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THE "PRACTICAL" SERIES

THE LETTER-WRITER'S HANDBOOK

Brown
BY
JOHN REXBURN



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PART I
PRINCIPLES OF EXPRESSION IN
CORRESPONDENCE

THE LETTER WRITER'S HANDBOOK

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS SAID AND HOW IT IS DONE

Introduction

LETTER writing is an important phase of business and social life. Altogether too many people seem to look upon letter writing as a very subordinate department of literature — as an “accident,” if I may be permitted to use the word here — of that delightful art or handicraft. Letters — and especially business correspondence — are declared to be governed by rules and principles of mechanical and artistic construction entirely different from those which should be observed by writers whose purpose is to provide for our entertainment or instruction the longer, more important, and scholarly essay, serious magazine article, or living book.

/ Such persons too often give as a weak

excuse for a short, choppy style, the declaration that they have not time to write in any other way. They frequently insist that attention to composition and style is not only unimportant in business correspondence, but is entirely out of place therein. This should be resented by all as a grave mistake. If no other reason were to be given for that declaration as to mistake, it would be quite sufficient to say that whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well. ✕

If the word *literature* has now come to have the accepted meaning of "the science of letters, literary productions," its foundation, *littera*, equal to "a letter," in the Latin language meant both the symbol, character of the alphabet, and a written message. In other words, the beginning of *literature* was the commencement of the art of writing letters, and therefore "correspondence" is something of real dignity and importance, deserving treatment as such.

Few people, and least of all busy commercial men, have patience with letter writers who attempt to be brief at the expense of being clear. The mistaken writers are also too apt to ignore grammatical rules in their effort to "save time" and econo-

mize words. Let it be noted carefully that in both the last two sentences I have implied my doubt as to such efforts being successful. If the writer of a letter expresses himself in the style which is permissible in a cablegram, it very often results that time is wasted by the receiver in trying to solve the puzzle that has been forced upon him, and in supplying by guesses omitted words that are absolutely necessary to the grammatical and rhetorical construction. In a cablegram, where every word, including address and signature, may cost from fifteen cents to two or three dollars, the receiver willingly adapts himself to the needs of economy; but no good reason can be given when such economy is entirely false, as it always is in the abbreviated form of letters.

Arthur Schopenhauer was a famous German pessimistic author, who died in 1860. One of his greatest works was a series of essays entitled *Parerga und Paralipomena*. It would be difficult to name a topic of art, philosophy, science, or anything else that is not at least touched upon in this wonderful work. Schopenhauer was a staunch upholder of the theory that no effective literary work was ever done for money, and that such

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can never be done. Naturally he has very little use for the business man or for correspondence which has for its sole purpose the making of money. He was certainly a demonstration of the theory, because the only compensation he received for this famous work was ten copies of the printed work itself. If it is of any service to readers, I may say that the title of Schopenhauer's great work, which is alluded to, may be given as "Additions and Omissions"; it being intended to convey the idea that all sorts of subjects are discussed.

One of the chapters in the original is entitled *Ueber Schriftstellerei und Stil*, or "Authorship and Style." It is divided in the best English translation, and two of the parts are given the titles "On Authorship" and "On Style." In that portion which discusses Style, Schopenhauer writes of the crime of seeking to secure brevity at the expense of clearness, as if it were a fault peculiar to those whom we call *authors*. That is, a *writer*, to Schopenhauer, meant the literary writer only; the writer of business letters would probably have been considered quite beneath the distinguished German's notice. Yet every criticism he makes

is as applicable to the business correspondent as it is to the man who writes books on the most scholarly subject. "By omitting something which would probably have made the meaning of the whole sentence clear, the statement is turned into a conundrum. The reader tries to solve the riddle by going over it again and again." I think many of my readers will agree with me when I say that this applies with direct force to a great deal of business correspondence. I am sure that will be the opinion if I should find so much favor in the eyes of experienced old hands at business correspondence as to induce them to read this book.

1. Attention to the General Scope of the Letter

✓ Since there are so many different kinds of letters, the general scope must vary according to the nature of the particular correspondence. But whatever the purpose of a letter may be, and no matter by whom it is dictated or written, it should be reasonably consistent in form and matter, as well as in the treatment of the subject. (As to *form*: if a letter is not in the best form

when ready to mail, burn it. If you are writing to a college president, he may not notice the "LL.D." after his name if it is put there in due form. He will certainly notice it if it is put there in bad form, as with a *period* between the two "L's." If his proper titles are omitted altogether, in addressing him in his presidential capacity, he might scorn the thought that he had noticed the omission.) Nevertheless, if in this respect and in all others the letter is not in due form, burn it. ✓ The principle of all successful letter-writing is that there should be absolutely nothing in its forms to draw the attention from its subject-matter. This caution applies not only to forms of etiquette and courtesy, but equally to grammatical and rhetorical forms. ✓ A failure in form *may* draw the attention from the most important idea in the letter, that upon which everything else depends. This is a sufficient reason for careful study of "due form" in all letters. In business there are reasons of final importance for all letters. Every business letter is expected to become part of a possible extended correspondence. What *may* seem trivial forms are long-tested methods of making the connection of

one letter with another in the plainest and least expensive way. Ignoring such tested forms may be very expensive at times. It is the best business, of course, to settle everything "out of court." But if any business transaction is forced into litigation, the court's decision may be compelled to turn on the doubt left by the omission to mention a date, the wrong use of names, or any one of a score of seemingly trivial "matters of form." Due form is determined, first, by courtesy and consideration for others. Nothing is more necessary than this, not even self-defense. Secondly, due form is a matter of self-defense. If self-defense, it should be kept below the surface. Formality ought never to obtrude itself. Ideas should never be disguised by forms. Forms should be used only to make it sure that ideas have the best dress language, in all its forms, can give them.

It must be clear to all who have had experience, that a letter should be intelligibly written, no matter whether it is the serious communication of a lawyer, giving information to a client, or to an associate for the purpose of discussing the way to conduct a particular case; or the frivolous note of

a young lady who is writing to a personal and most intimate friend to tell about social affairs and the latest bit of permissible gossip. In its general scope no communication ought ever to be written without some reason, and to setting forth that reason the best effort of the writer should be given. It is not the purpose of this book to give attention to those letters which are written merely from a sense of duty, and which, by their own appearance, make that duty appear to be a disagreeable one. There may be occasion to write such letters, indeed there is too often just that necessity; but the world would be better off in every way were such written communications banished from human affairs.

The scope of a letter should properly mean the range of the one subject, when it is so restricted, or the various subjects if more than one is considered. It is unpardonable, in the latter case, if there is confusion from letting subjects which are not related jostle one another in the same paragraph. Furthermore, the way in which the writer addresses his correspondent is a feature of scope which deserves attention. It should be clear to all that the tone of a

letter written to a university president by an undergraduate should have a precision and form that need not be considered when the writer is addressing a familiar classmate.

2. Attention to Details

Until we come to the intimate, "chummy" note of the warmest friends, details are probably of about as much importance as is the special subject-matter of the letter. The word "details," as here used, of course implies two things: the mechanical arrangement of a letter, and the precise way in which the matter is to be treated in the communication. In a certain sense the former of these comes within the scope of "form," because all business men now give careful attention to the system which they require all their clerks to follow in arranging the details of a letter. Practical and experienced men likewise look for a certain conformity to just such rules in the letters they receive from their correspondents. There is good reason for these facts, and for the expectation of business men that others of their class shall show a reasonable measure of willingness to use the same or similar forms.

As a matter of economy of time and labor, attention to details in various mechanical ways facilitates the preservation of correspondence, and enables the busy person promptly to turn to any letter which may be desired for reference. It is not altogether a useless repetition of what has been said to insist that your correspondent has a right to a full measure of courtesy in the way he is to be addressed, and in the way in which the letter is to be phrased. The brusqueness which characterizes some business letters is a needless violation of both "form" and "details," and should be avoided.

In the body of the letter "details" are to be treated systematically and consistently, so that the various links in a chain of correspondence (that is, the numerous letters which enter into it) may properly fit into one another, and the sequence of statement, interrogation, and answer be preserved harmoniously without demanding any special effort in doing so.

3. Treatment of the Subject

It is well to repeat the well-known saying, that whatever is worth doing at all is

worth doing well. It is always advisable, when it can be done, to restrict each business letter to one subject. This, as will be made clear in a later chapter, helps greatly to facilitate business, not only as to the bearing of correspondence upon it, but in the execution of details. It will probably be found that the treatment of a subject varies greatly, and in accordance with the familiarity which the two parties in the correspondence have with the particular matter under consideration.

In beginning a correspondence the subject cannot be treated too thoroughly or too explicitly. If the first letter contains an offer to sell something, it is manifest that the article to be sold should be fully described, and great emphasis laid upon the ability of the person who makes the offer to supply that article upon the most advantageous terms — price and credit — and with exceptional promptness. Description will be as elaborate as possible, and price-lists, illustrated catalogues, and any other pertinent literature furnished.

On the other hand, the first proposal to buy something must be so full, as to details, that the receiver of the letter cannot

well misunderstand the features of style, finish, quantity, price, etc. In these initial letters of such a correspondence it should be the aim of the writer to avoid scrupulously all ambiguity; and this requirement will be safely accomplished by attention given to grammar and rhetoric, as well as to technical matters. After the correspondence has been intelligently established, conciseness may be carried to an extent which previously would have been hazardous.

If I were writing to a shoe-manufacturer from whom I contemplated ordering extensively, but with whom I had never before corresponded, I should consider it my duty to be over-explicit, even at the risk of provoking his mirth at my seeming lack of familiarity with the shoe-trade, or at the apparent imputation I put upon his intelligence. But after business relations had been established between us, by the giving and filling of several orders, I should feel that I might be so technical and laconic as to write: "Please quote, 240, Nos. 1100 to 1119, equal." I should know there was no danger of misunderstanding or complication. Shoes are sold by pairs: therefore 240 means that number of pairs: the manufacturer's

price-list is arranged very precisely by numbers which identify kind, quality, size, etc., by those numbers; therefore I wish from number 1100 to number 1119, inclusive, and an equal number of pairs of each of those catalogue numbers.

4. Business Letters

No two commercial men will probably agree in drawing up a fixed code of rules for governing the way to write all business letters, when we include in such a code form, style, details, technicalities, and all that goes to make up such a letter. There cannot, therefore, be any absolute standard established; yet a few cautionary remarks may be safely made.

It is of the greatest importance that the business man should know *what* he wishes to say, and to have some idea as to *how* he will say it. To get this essential knowledge, there ought to be a preliminary consideration of the subject, details, and — most of all — of the correspondent himself. Tastes differ widely in this matter of business correspondence, and this divergence of taste should be carefully considered.

If one correspondent likes to have his

letters answered in a dignified and graceful manner, with special attention given to titles of courtesy or respect, while another prefers conciseness which almost amounts to bluntness, it is the duty of the considerate letter-writer to respect these idiosyncrasies, even though they may seem to him to be unpardonably eccentric.

Personally, I should try to avoid the extreme of the second type that has been mentioned unless I knew I was dealing with a business man of such strength of character and determination that he would be called obstinate, were he exactly described without regard to the impropriety of calling names.

It will be noticed by those who have the opportunity to read business letters of many kinds, that the frequent use of cipher codes by those engaged in foreign commerce, or in domestic trade when this calls for considerable use of the telegraph, will exert a tendency towards the use of terseness in written letters that is somewhat similar to telegraphic correspondence. Admirable and imperative as is this economy of words when using the wires, it may easily be carried to an improper extreme in letters, unless the writer keeps careful watch over himself.

5. Ordinary and Social Letters

In these the code of rules is so flexible as almost to forbid giving advice or even offering a suggestion. In the letters which pass between relatives and intimate friends the peculiarities of the correspondent will be carefully considered by the writer. If the relative or friend likes to be addressed in a familiar way, and to have the matter of the letter treated with diffuseness, his taste may properly be gratified.

I am probably not at all singular or unique in numbering among my relatives and acquaintances with whom I correspond some who are not satisfied with a letter that does not go into the most minute particulars of my family life and my own, whether we are quietly at home, or traveling in our own country or abroad. These correspondents wish to be told of our daily occupations, tasks, and pleasures; what we eat, what we wear, what we read, and so on through the whole range of our intercourse, whether with one another or with relatives and friends, as well as that with strangers. Other correspondents would be bored to

death by all these trivial details, and they are content to be told that we are well, or, if the opposite be unfortunately the case, what the ailment may be and its character, whether serious or mild.

It is but right to consider the whims of those with whom we carry on a correspondence. If they adopt the interrogative style and make their letters a battery of questions, it is reasonable to assume that, having answered their questions, they would like to be similarly interrogated. The same things, in reason, may be said of social letters, although this class of correspondence is generally restricted to brief and concrete notes. Yet whatever may be the character of the letter or note in these respects, it is but graceful and courteous that the bounds of propriety should never be overstepped. If our language is permitted to be so friendly and familiar that the occasional use of slang is tolerated, it should never by any chance be allowed to become vulgar. It is safe to say that those who are blessed with good taste in other matters will display the same praiseworthy trait in their correspondence; while those whose instincts lead them to disobey the unwritten laws of propriety at

any time will not listen to advice in the matter of social correspondence.

There is one recommendation that should be given here: which is to treat the friendliest of letters in somewhat the same way that the good business man does his correspondence. Read each letter carefully, and see that every question is answered in the reply. Every request for information should be responded to, if this can be done with reasonable ease and entire propriety. Impudent questions deserve a snub, no matter what the nature of the correspondence may be.

CHAPTER II

CONCISENESS

I. Conciseness is not Curtness

WEBSTER'S definitions which are applicable to these two words are: "Conciseness: expressing much in a few words; condensed; brief and compact;—used of *style* in writing or speaking." But he also gives this caution, quoted from Ben Jonson: "The *concise* style, which expresseth not enough, but leaves somewhat to be understood." *Curt* is short or brief in language; brief; condensed; *especially*, short to a fault; characterized by excessive brevity; unduly concise; as, *curt* limits, a *curt* answer. Yet, again, he modifies this by quoting Washington Irving: "the *curt* yet comprehensive reply."

All authorities on composition and rhetoric are agreed in warning writers and speakers against confusing the two qualities, conciseness and curtness. The former is always to be commended; the latter is

always to be condemned. It is quite sufficient to say concisely: "Please come with me to the post-office." It is not necessary to load down the sentence with a lot of superfluous words to express your appreciation of the favor consent will confer, and a great deal more. It may be desirable and courteous to give a reason for making the request, if it is likely to cause inconvenience. Yet the reply may be entirely *too* concise, if it is expressed rudely, "I won't!" As a matter of fact, there are twice as many words in that phrase as in the single word "No"; but the latter may be spoken in such a way as to put away entirely all impression of curtness.

In writing business letters, it is *always* well to say what is to be expressed with the minimum of words; but curtness in a letter is, if possible, more offensive than in speech. In the letter this rudeness has a permanency which does not obtain in the spoken words.

2. The Social Letter may properly be Diffuse

Diffuseness is practically the exact opposite of conciseness. Yet while it would be almost a crime for a person to send a dif-

fuse letter to a busy man, it would not be at all out of place for a student, writing to a classmate, or one society leader to send to her intimate friend, a letter which has hundreds of words that are not absolutely necessary, and many wordy expressions which might well be condemned in any commercial or official correspondence. In the friendly style of polite correspondence it is seldom right to be over-concise. This type of written communication is a good deal the same as the conversation of the drawing-room. In the counting-room or bank-parlor the monosyllables "yes" and "no" are most popular: time and breath are there to be saved as much as possible. In the drawing-room those same words might often seem to be offensively curt. It is the same with letters. Some of the most delightful social letters of recent times are condemned by "practical" men simply because they take a score of words to *express* what might be *said* with five. Yet artistically those other fifteen words may not be absolutely redundant. There are plenty of people who can make a few pencil-strokes on a piece of paper, and nobody would hesitate to say that they suggest a house with a tree stand-

ing beside it, and the branches stretching over the house. But the skilful artist who successfully depicts the scene, "Under the spreading chestnut tree the village smithy stands," has to do a good deal more than give a bald outline. Still, even the social letter must never be *prolix*, that is, so diffuse as to become tiresome. Many critics declare unhesitatingly that the entirely successful social letter is the most difficult to write, because it must be diffuse enough to entertain and yet sufficiently concise to avoid being a bore.

3. Importance of Paragraphs

Paragraphs lend themselves to the accomplishment of conciseness and clearness as well as to justifiable diffuseness. To give a concrete illustration of this importance. Suppose that Macaulay's and Lowell's essays were printed in literal succession, page after page, without any divisions or separations, and no other arrangement than chronological order. It is not a difficult matter for any one to see, with the mind's eye, what hopeless confusion would result: there would be lines in which we could not tell whether it was the Englishman or the American who

was speaking. The sale of such a useless set of books, it is needless to say, would not bring in returns sufficient to pay for the printer's ink!

Now, we may always use an extreme case, even an impossible one, by way of illustration, and from that come down to what is fairly common. In business correspondence competent writers condemn putting into the same letter matters which are so unrelated as to make even the separate paragraphs given to them as distinct as different books by one and the same author. Such precise critics go still further, and would separate into different letters topics which might safely be committed to neighboring paragraphs.

If the commendable subdivision into separate letters is not approved, or if it is found to be impracticable, there can be no disputing that each important topic, as well as each distinct subdivision of that topic, should have its own paragraph. Paragraphs are one of the most effective ways to economize the reader's attention, and that is the primary object of style. Marginal titles and sub-titles are not used in business correspondence, as they are in some books, especially in those which are prepared for use in

schools and colleges; yet many business men note in the margin, opposite each paragraph, a word or two to direct their thoughts. It need not be stated here how greatly the careful division into paragraphs contributes to this excellent system of annotating.

4. Short Sentences: Argument for and against

Writers of guides to correspondence, and of books which tell how to write for publication, as well as authors of text-books on grammar, composition, rhetoric, etc., are unanimous in advocating, to the point of commanding, the use of short sentences. There is no question that a single thought expressed with the fewest possible words in the shortest practicable sentence *does* economize the reader's attention, and in business letters that is the first consideration. This form also gives to the writer's thought a sledge-hammer effect in getting into the brain of another man. Yet if you turn to Schopenhauer's "The Art of Literature," Spencer's "Philosophy of Style," Arlo Bates's "Talks on Writing English," and perhaps any other book that is appropriate, you will find that the author habitually com-

mits the very fault which he condemns. There is a nervous, jerky style of writing which expresses the writer's thoughts in short, choppy sentences that are sometimes very effective; but the sentences read somewhat as a certain kind of music — *staccato* — sounds, and is seldom pleasing, never soothing. It is not a graceful style, because in literary composition grace and dignity must be attained by *periods* of some length. A "period" in this sense means all the words in a complete expression, from one full stop to the next; or, in other words, between the punctuation marks called *periods*. In business correspondence the short sentence is preferable if it is complete. Let the sentence, then, be appropriate to the style of writing, and if the expression of the thought is not clouded, or if the matter is not stated in an involved way, do not be afraid of a long sentence. Yet always remember that there is reason in all things.

5. Clear, Clean Sentences

The thought that is to be expressed must be given in words that are appropriate and whose meaning is clear. In business letters preference should always be given to the

shorter of two precise synonyms, because it is fair to assume that the shorter is understood by more than may comprehend the meaning of the longer word. But polysyllables have their uses, and a comprehensive vocabulary is a valuable asset for the strictest business correspondent.

The true commercial man who permits himself to use metaphor, hyperbole, or figures of speech in his office correspondence commits an unpardonable mistake. Clearness is sacrificed to something which will usually be ridiculed as silly pedantry. The word "clear" is used in this section as synonymous with "direct": there is a certain thing to be said, and there should be but *one* way to say it. That way is accomplished by using simple words put together in a direct expression, so that the writer's meaning is understood at once. If there is any possibility that your correspondent may have to re-read a single sentence in order to grasp your meaning, the letter is not clear, and the doubtful sentence ought to be rewritten. Or, if you have used a figure of speech in which words have a force and meaning that are not what are commonly given them, this is to be con-

demned, for it may be that the reader will have to consult a dictionary or a thesaurus in order to understand clearly what you mean. Such waste of time is inconsiderate.

A "clean" sentence is one that is both complete and intelligible. As an illustration of what a "clean-cut" sentence is *not*, reference may be made to the bad habit of omitting words that are grammatically necessary. "Received your letter of 10th. Can't say what result of investigation is." This reads something like a telegram, and is not clear and clean. Conciseness is secured at a sacrifice which is not called for in the letter of the busiest "hustler" who ever lived.

6. "Brevity is the Soul of Wit"

We do not write our letters as we express a riddle or perpetrate a joke. Brevity in this connection is assumed to refer to business correspondence, and it does not so much mean short, perhaps incomplete, sentences as it does a brief but complete letter.

There is something to be said, and the most effective and easiest way to say it is to write short, clear sentences, and when that has been done, stop. The business man is not supposed to be telling a story to a

circle of children or young folks. In the tale it may be there is a necessary divergence from the main theme in order to make the listeners understand just why the Prince found it advisable to disguise himself as an old woman in order to get into the giant's castle. Most readers will remember that "The Arabian Nights" is a series of tales which are dependent upon one another, each — towards its close — giving excuse for the next. The first is not actually completed, because when the end of that story comes, the Sultan's young (and latest) wife is to have her head chopped off in order to prevent her from being unfaithful to him. There was a shrewd purpose in dragging out the stories, and making one after another of them seem to be parentheses, without ever getting back to and completing the original one. The ruse was successful: after a thousand and one nights, the Sultana was proved to be faithful and discreet!

The first duty of the business man is to know *what* he has to say; the second is to determine *how* to express himself; and the third is to be able to decide just *when* he has said it and to know how to stop. This is the way in which the quoted proverb ap-

plies to business correspondence. At the same time brevity is equally the soul of wit in all correspondence; only *brevity* here has a varying meaning as it is applied to the different types of letters.

PART II
BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

CHAPTER I

IMPORTANCE OF GOOD MECHANICAL FORM

I. Explanation of Meaning

BY this is meant the way of writing the place, the date, the name of the person, firm, or company addressed, and other details at the beginning of a letter. At the close of the letter good mechanical form will be secured by giving attention to a few matters which will be mentioned later. Most business men now have their letter-paper printed with the full post-office address in the upper right-hand part of the sheet. In the upper left-hand corner there is often a statement of the profession or business specialty; whether the number of the post-office box should be given with the place, at the right, or the statement, at the left, is optional.

The term "business men" as used in this book includes incorporated companies, joint stock companies, partnerships, individuals, professional men, and all who have occa-

sion to write business letters. All business men now have their letters typewritten, and preserve a carbon copy of all communications. These carbon copies are then filed away, or kept in a binder. In order to be able to turn quickly to a particular letter, each is given a number. It is quite customary, when this system is followed, to give at the head of the letter a request that this number shall be referred to when replying. The position given to such a request is part of the mechanical form; it should not be too conspicuous, and yet it must be sufficiently so that it may not be easily overlooked. Perhaps the best place is just under the date line.

Again, the closing of a business letter is an important part of good mechanical form. In the United States a certain abruptness is not only permitted but approved, and when the correspondence is for "home" people this is quite satisfactory. But when a business man begins correspondence with people in foreign lands, he should be willing to conform, in a measure certainly, to the customs of the people in that country.

2. Margins, Spacing, Paragraphs

Margins. — It is important that a good margin be left at the left-hand side of business letters in order that the entire contents of the letter may be easily read after it has been filed away. The right-hand margin is a less important matter, but with the almost universal use of the typewriter it has become customary to leave more space here than was usually done in the days of pen-written correspondence. Many business men insist upon not having a word broken, and part, followed by a hyphen, allowed to appear at the end of the line, the remaining syllables coming in the next line. This is a plan which is to be commended.

Spacing. — The typewriter is now rarely adjusted so that the space between lines is so narrow as to make reading difficult; but there is some danger that a person who uses a pen may err in this matter. The space between words is almost fixed, in correspondence, by the mechanism of the typewriting machine; but many law-courts require this space to be doubled.

Paragraphs. — The first paragraph of a business letter is generally given to those

formal expressions which refer to the letter to be answered, its date, contents, etc. The succeeding parts of the letter are carefully divided into paragraphs so that each subject and each important subdivision of the subject may have its own paragraph. The alignment of these paragraphs, so that each one begins at the same distance from the left-hand margin as the others, is important.

3. Directness

This is a very important matter; and its importance is of two kinds: first, to avoid unnecessary words and phrases; second, to avoid being abrupt. In former times, when it was not a rule for business men to keep copies of the letters they wrote, and to file away letters received from their correspondents, it was customary to quote from the letter under reply something in this way: "We have received your letter of the 10th ult., in which you inquire as to," and then give a résumé of what the correspondent asked. After that the writer gave his reply, and if he could do so, the information desired. This custom is still followed by many of the conservative houses of Europe, and it has not been absolutely given up by some

of the old-timers in the United States. But it is hardly necessary now, as letters may be so easily referred to by date or number. Therefore, after referring to the date of the letter under reply, and to its identification number, if one is used, let the important matter receive attention at once, and allow the desired information to be given as concisely as possible.

It is probably *not* true, as some rather cynical persons have declared, that politeness is a lost art in business circles today; but it is certain that the ordinary business man now has little time to waste, and to such a one it does seem altogether a waste of time to read a lot of mere politeness, nor does such a man feel called upon to put into his reply any unnecessary compliments; there is a thoroughly polite way to be direct, and yet to avoid an abruptness which is displeasing or offensive. In the days of our grandfathers, when trade journals were not at all specialized, and when newspapers were not so common as now, it was customary for each general merchant to send his regular correspondents a "news-letter" which went over the whole range of his operation. Such a communication would be considered

quite out of place in a business letter nowadays.

4. Clearness

This is a feature of business correspondence to which too much importance cannot be attached. It is a quality which may be gained in two ways, by education or by practise. Our business colleges do not, as a rule, give sufficient attention to this matter, because it demands a knowledge of grammar, rhetoric, and composition which is rarely gained in such a school. Other educational institutions claim, and with much reason, that they are training students to be of use in business, industrial, and scientific life, but too often the education given in colleges and universities is altogether technical, and the important matter of correspondence is sadly neglected. Hence it is generally admitted that the knowledge gained by practise is the best to secure clearness with conciseness.

Every business man who wishes to have his letters impart to his correspondents precisely what he has in mind, nothing less and nothing more, should give a few minutes' careful thought to what he is going to say,

before he puts pen to paper or summons his stenographer for dictation. Too frequently does haste make waste of time and energy, but the evil goes beyond the office where the letter originates, and because of a lack of clearness a good customer may be lost. For other men are just as likely to be busy as is the writer of the letter, and he who receives a letter that is not clear as to its meaning is pretty sure not to waste much time in trying to make out what it was the writer intended to say.

Topics. — Of great importance in gaining this desired end, clearness, is ability to divide information to be given into topics, and to discuss each one as briefly and clearly as possible.

5. Dangers from Dictation

Perhaps the greatest of these is the tendency to become actually dictatorial. The association between the business man and his stenographer, and we may assume that the stenographer is also the typist, is very apt to induce a slight feeling of amiable superiority; so that the active business man finds himself, so to speak, writing in rather a mandatory way to his stenographer rather

than to his correspondent. This condition of affairs has been found to exist, and to work mischief when the busy principal, with whom time is money, allows himself to get into the habit of feeling that his part of the task is finished when the letter has been dictated. He has found his assistant to be responsible mechanically; that is, the stenographer makes no mistakes in detail, or in general phraseology, or in understanding facts. The letters are copied, the mechanical details have been satisfactorily attended to, and the business man merely affixes his signature without taking the time to read over the letter carefully, and, while doing so, to try to put himself in the position of the correspondent to whom the letter is addressed. Dictation gives its best results in letters which may be disposed of in a few lines each. For all important ones, in which ideas ought to be conveyed from the writer's mind to that of his correspondent with the least possibility of failure to impart precisely what is intended, and without danger of friction, it is most desirable that the writer himself make a careful pencil-draft of the letter. The draft is then typed by his assistant, and, if necessary, revised

by himself before signing. This method, recommended by some of the best business-letter-writers, is one which has been largely responsible for their ability, simply because of this excellent practise.

CHAPTER II

MODE OF ADDRESS

1. How to address Correspondents

EVERY individual, firm, or corporation, as well as every group of people banded together for any commercial or industrial purpose which makes it possible that letters will be written to that group officially, is entitled to a term of courtesy or respect, with the possible exception to be mentioned later on. I have known some admirable, polite, and experienced business men, who could not be charged with any disposition to hurt the feelings of others, who refused absolutely to use any such term. Their correspondents were simply *John Smith*, or *Smith, Brown and Co.*, or *The National Balloon Co.* This brusqueness may be tolerated, but I contend that it is improper. Other men of experience quite as wide as the haters of all such terms of courtesy and respect, support me entirely in my contention. The consensus of opinion is so en-

tirely with me, that I have no hesitation in saying that any business man who wishes to expand his operations into territories beyond our own borders must conform to this rule, or run the risk of having his letters ignored.

Some writers say that so long as we can establish the personality of the addressee, and provided there is no danger that we may be writing to a firm or company in which both men and women are associated, we may use a title. But this I consider wrong. The same rule applies in these cases as in laws, legislative enactments, etc., "The masculine includes the feminine, and the singular includes the plural"; therefore, even when we know that Thomas Brown and Mary Robinson and William Jenkins are in partnership and doing business under the style of Brown, Robinson and Co., it is entirely proper to address the firm as *Messrs. Brown, Robinson and Co., Dear Sirs.* The same reasoning applies to corporations.

2. Recognized Differences in American and European Correspondence

These are conspicuous in several aspects. First, there is the invariable use of *Mr.* or

Messrs. or *Esq.* Even when writing to such an abstract personality as the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, the Briton (and the Continental European as well) would, it is perfectly safe to say without exception, address that corporation as *Messrs.* *The Pennsylvania Railroad Company*, and he would not only be polite, but he would be consistent in every way. Because, if we think of him as writing to the officials who manage the affairs of that company, he is writing to a number of "Misters," and custom, good usage, and every other rule of polite correspondence authorize the use of *Messrs.* I decline to admit that the form *Messrs.*, the abbreviation of the French *Messieurs*, is un-English, or even that it is un-American.

As to the title *Mr.* or *Esq.*, the abbreviation of *Esquire*, there is wide difference in usage on the two sides of the Atlantic. In the United States a great many persons, to whose opinion the utmost consideration should be given, contend that *Esq.* should be limited to those who have been admitted to practise law — "called to the bar" is the British form — although it may be applied to men of some years who are recognized as of importance in the community. It is

hardly necessary to discuss here the true meaning and origin of the word "Esquire." An esquire was originally an attendant upon a knight, and himself in the line of promotion to that rank. In Great Britain *Esq.* is applied to almost every man who is not actually a tradesman. The use of this title among men who are social equals and of some importance in other walks of life besides the learned professions, which have their own titles, is spreading in the United States.

3. How to close a Business Letter

Any one who has had the opportunity to look over correspondence bearing dates any time before the middle of the last century will find that rarely did the writer fail to wind up his business letter, even, with some courteous expression, and graceful peroration or climax, something like: *Without further of interest to add, and commending the foregoing to your favorable consideration, I have the honor to be, Your obedient, humble servant.*

Everything as elaborate as this has disappeared from the business correspondence of even the most conservative of "The

City" houses of London; but there will often be found in the letters of British commercial houses, when these are written toward the end of December, a complimentary phrase like: *With the compliments of the season, we are.* This little bit of commercial courtesy is not absolutely unknown in America. It is merely a matter of custom, and in its right place the one custom is as good as the other.

None but the most conservative business men in the British Empire now close their letters with the polite but meaningless phrase, *Your obedient servant*, but *Yours faithfully*, is altogether common with British merchants everywhere; so popular is this phrase, indeed, that in all parts of the world, outside the United States of America, where American merchants associate with British, it is a common thing for the former to conform to the ways of the latter in this respect as well as in many others. The American *Yours truly* is, however, entirely satisfactory. In business letters, nevertheless, this should never be *Yours very truly*, and such phrases as *Yours sincerely* are simply ridiculous in business correspondence.

4. Handwriting and Signature

This short section has to deal entirely with the pen-written letters of the business man who does not himself use a typewriter, or does not care to employ a stenographer and typist. When such a man has decided what mechanical forms he will follow in constructing his letter — that is, the date line, the form of address, the margin, etc. — it is well for him to adhere to that particular form consistently, unless, of course, he is convinced that another is preferable.

Handwriting is not always surely controlled by the penman. Not only is handwriting very often a natural gift, but frequently its character is changed by reason of good or bad influences and habits. Yet every business man who is compelled to write out his business letters with the pen should try to make his work legible. There is rarely any excuse for the grotesque, almost always unreadable signature which is often affixed to business letters, and there is absolutely no reason for it. It is simply an affectation. Some writers of these weird scrawls, which they make for signatures, say that the more grotesque and involved they are, the more

difficult is it to forge them. This is not true. The most difficult signature to be counterfeited is the plain, open one, which approximates the handwriting of a good schoolboy, or the copperplate style of a writing-master.

5. Marginal References, Enclosure, etc.

It is not often that a thoughtfully composed and carefully written business-letter will require any marginal references in order to assist the receiver in following the writer's meaning. Yet a concrete example of a case in which these were serviceable may suggest others, and the recommendation will be equally pertinent in form. A business firm in Japan was given a contract to import all the steel and metal required to build the hull of a steamer. Detailed and elaborate specifications were sent to the manufacturer at, let us say, Norwalk, Connecticut. Each separate size and style of every kind of material needed was given a number and a code word. In the correspondence relating to this matter every reference to some particular size of plates, or beams, or whatever else it might be, could be indicated in the margin of letters by the specification number and the code word. Economy of labor

was thus practised. Each such marginal reference should be so clearly separated from the text that danger of overlooking will be removed.

At the end of the letter, a line or two below the signature, and at the left-hand margin, should be the word *Enclosures* (when there are any), and below it, indented somewhat, a list thereof, each one on a separate line. Attention should be given to what is technically called "display" — that is, the use of large or small capital letters, black-faced or light-faced type, italics, and other ways of drawing the reader's attention to something particular. All this, of course, has to do with type-written letters, although practically the same end may be accomplished by underlining pen-written words in the conventional way.

CHAPTER III

SUBJECT-MATTER

1. Subject of Letter under Reply

IN business correspondence it is rarely necessary to do more than mention the date of the letter to which one is replying, or to identify it by the index number which the writer has given it. Yet this is not an infallible rule even in domestic correspondence, especially when the advantage that may possibly be gained from the correspondence is essentially one-sided.

Suppose, for example, that A. wishes to sell a large quantity of lumber, all sawn and some of it dressed, in almost infinite variety of shapes and sizes. He sends to B. a complete list with prices affixed, and solicits an order. B. replies by asking for some more particular information regarding fifty different lines. When A. answers that letter, it would be well to recapitulate to a certain extent B.'s letter somewhat in this way: *Your letter of March 5th is received.*

You inquire how soon we can deliver so and so (copying the list exactly). In reply, we have to say that, barring accidents and delays beyond our control, we guarantee delivery at Bridgeport by June 10. This repetition may save B. some trouble, and it is worth while making it for that reason if for no other. In this particular case it is assumed that A. is going to derive the greater benefit from a successful ending of the correspondence, and that B. is known to be able to supply his requirements in the lumber way from any one of many sources. It seems to be evident that B. is likely to follow the line of least resistance, which is the popular way of saying that a thing is done in the easiest possible manner. It may not be difficult for B. to have all the correspondence placed before him with the list and all that concerns the possible transaction; but if even a little of this labor is spared him, the result may be to A.'s benefit.

Many business men make it a rule always to give a concise recapitulation of the letter to which they are replying; and this is not at all a bad habit.

2. Attention to Inquiries by Correspondent

This is rather a delicate subject upon which to venture advice. Some business men — and, I am sorry to say, the majority of them are Americans — declare that their time is too valuable for them to pay even a little attention to any but their regular customers and correspondents. But if we go back to the beginnings of the individual, firm, or corporation, who now takes this very autocratic stand, we may often find that it was just by giving careful attention to every inquiry, no matter from whom it came, that the foundation of the concern's prosperity was laid.

On the other hand, there are many brilliant examples of great firms who consider the matter of correspondence so important that one member thereof, or a high-rank subordinate, is specially detailed to take charge of all letters received. The first duty of this person is to decide which letters shall receive attention from the active, senior members; and to each one of the rest he gives a reply, very brief it may be, but at least he tries to answer all inquiries. It is an excellent rule to follow, that every letter is

entitled to the courtesy of some sort of reply.

"Business" is a word of such wide scope that it includes even the editors of magazines and newspapers; and these are notoriously the greatest offenders in the matter of allowing letters to go unanswered, simply because there seems to be nothing in them that may benefit the individual editor himself or the journal with which he is connected.

3. Clear, Full, Concise Response

There is really no confusion or repetition in these three terms. The necessity for a clear reply should be manifest to all, and the danger which may result from being ambiguous is well illustrated by a concrete example. A physician in the Far East wrote to the makers of a certain road-cart whose illustrated advertisement in a magazine had interested him. He asked for information as to price, delivery, etc. The reply stated that the cart would be delivered "in the usual way" to agents of a steamship line at New York. This seemed to be satisfactory, and the order was given. When the cart arrived at its destination, it was not

only standing on its own wheels, but the shafts had not been taken off. The freight amounted to nearly three times the price of the vehicle. It is needless to say that the important essentials of a good business letter — clearness, fulness, and conciseness — had not been observed, and instead of there being a number of "repeat" orders, as there might have been, for the cart was pleasing to many, the maker failed to secure some good business. For when remonstrated with for not packing the cart in the smallest possible space, the retort was "That is our usual way of shipping, and we do not see any reason why we should change our custom." It must be rather difficult, of course, for a business man to put himself in the position of some of his correspondents, and to think of himself as absolutely ignorant of details of his business. Yet in many cases it is necessary that something of the sort be done, if the reply to a letter is to be clear, full, and concise.

4. The Writer's Original Information

Here, again, it is very frequently necessary for a business man to put himself in the position of his correspondent, and unless

that person is one with whom long association has brought about a perfect understanding of technicalities, forms of expression, abbreviations, etc., the original information can hardly be too simply expressed.

Original information rarely appears in a long-established correspondence between business men; it is usually the effort of a beginner who wishes to make his way. Such a one too frequently considers himself particularly fortunate in getting hold of some lists of addresses of established firms, business men, and private individuals, to whom he proceeds to send either a circular or a circular letter. It is probably no unique experience that I have had in receiving such letters, which were almost Greek to me because the writer did not impart his original information in intelligible terms.

We must also consider the case of a business man giving original information which has been suggested by something in the letter to which he is replying. It is not difficult to think of this as being done in a way that must arouse opposition on the part of his correspondent. Probably all business men of long experience will agree in saying

that this is far more likely to be a fault committed by a young man than by an older one.

An amusing but entirely true story will illustrate the point which it is desired to make. It must be prefaced by the explanation that the crisp form of bread which most Americans call "crackers" all Britons call "biscuits." The Holdfast Cracker Company found that it could get dies for its crackers of better quality and cheaper in England than in the United States. This was, however, many years ago. An order was sent to England. Before the dies came, a letter was received to this effect: "*We have duly filled your esteemed order; but as we knew very well a mistake had been made, we have changed the word 'cracker' to 'biscuit.'*" The Holdfast Company promptly returned the dies, and wrote to say that it claimed to know its own business: if its order could be filled, well and good; if not, cancel it. Further correspondence disclosed the fact that a new manager had taken charge of the business in England, and being rather young he was a little too liberal with his original information.

5. Ought a Business Letter to be restricted to a Single Subject?

If the answer to this question were based upon the stand taken by some government departments, great industrial establishments, and private firms of wide and powerful influence, it would be "yes." Furthermore, if we think of it as a matter of economizing time and labor for both parties to the correspondence, then again the answer would be affirmative. A letter of inquiry seeking various information that the writer ought to know (if he does not) must come from different bureaus of the same government department, or similarly from different parts of the manufacturing establishment or private firm, should be divided into paragraphs most certainly, each one carefully restricted to one particular topic. But even this involves considerable risk. The letter must be passed from hand to hand, and each one of the persons who receive it must take a copy of that which concerns him, or the inquiry noted and the letter referred to subsequently, when the time comes for reply. There is grave danger that the letter of inquiry may be injured or misplaced entirely.

All these considerations being given their full weight, it is probably wise to say that a business letter had better be restricted to a single subject.

CHAPTER IV

VARIOUS STYLES

1. The Letter imparts General Information about Markets

IT is reasonably safe to say that such a letter will go to correspondents abroad, because such information is readily obtained by domestic merchants from their daily newspapers or regular trade journals. This being the case, the writer will determine whether he is to conform, completely or only partly, to the usage of the country of his correspondent, or adhere strictly to the mode of expression to which he has always been accustomed. It is probable that every go-ahead business man will choose the former method, and quickly learn how to express himself technically so as to be clearly understood by his correspondent. This will often necessitate the use of currency terms, weights, and measures, and other commercial details which are strange to him. Inasmuch as our export trade is increasing,

and a great deal of business is now being transacted with Spanish-speaking peoples, an appropriate suggestion here is to ask if it is not worth while for business men who are pushing export and import business to carry on their correspondence in the Spanish language, in order that this general information may be given in a way that will please correspondents and facilitate trade? If this is determined upon, it will be necessary to acquire also familiarity with the Spanish style of business correspondence, and that is totally different from the United States variety of the English model. Styles of address, mechanical details, forms of closing a letter, and other features show the punctilious courtesy of the Spanish hidalgo, even if "trade" is declared to be offensive to such aristocrats.

2. The Letter deals with a Particular Subject exclusively

This makes the letter much easier to write in some ways, and yet it may be a little more difficult in others. When the business man has but one article to which he devotes his attention, it is proper to assume that he has become an expert in that one article. He

certainly ought to be able to discuss it in its various aspects most intelligently. In that case we should expect a letter from him to be a model of precision and information. Yet it is not taking an unpardonable risk to say that every business man who gives his attention, as he thinks, to one article exclusively will, if subjected to a friendly but thorough cross-examination, quickly find that there is no such thing in his business as absolute exclusiveness. No matter what the article may be — raw hides from Argentina, or dainty silks from Japan and China, or fragrant coffee from Mocha — there will be conditions apparently outside his legitimate field which demand attention, and when he thinks he is writing a letter given exclusively to one topic, there will creep in incidental topics of varying proportions if the letter is to give full information to his correspondent. Such a letter can hardly be restricted to the asking and selling prices. There must be some discussion of the reasons which cause the momentary activity or depression; the probable supplies in sight or on the way; and one may almost say a thousand details to make the seemingly simple letter a truly complicated one after all.

3. The Letter is somewhat Perfunctory

This is when a business man finds himself involved in a correspondence which deals with something that interests him little personally or not at all; or it takes up a phase of his business which is entirely new to him, or which he has already investigated and decided that it is not sufficiently promising to justify his giving time and thought to it. Perhaps he dislikes to invest in it the capital which he is convinced may be more profitably kept within the restricted field he has developed for himself. Yet there is something personal about the writer of the letter he has received, or it presents the case in such a way that the receiver feels he cannot ignore it.

The proper reply to such a letter involves much careful thought and a good deal of practise in business correspondence to prevent the perfunctoriness becoming so apparent as to be offensive. It is a subject about which it is almost impossible to give advice or even intelligent suggestion. The best that can be done is to utter a word of caution: the writer of a letter which causes the one who is to answer it to feel

that he does not care to do so, and yet is compelled to, will assuredly detect the perfunctoriness unless it is very skilfully concealed.

4. The Letter is Instructive

By this is meant that the letter gives instructions to a correspondent who is not in any way subordinate to the writer, and is not in the nature of a command. It will almost always be the conclusion of a series of letters in which the propriety of doing a certain thing and the ways of accomplishing that certain purchase or sale have been discussed.

These preliminary conditions having been found satisfactory, the correspondent is instructed — “requested” might perhaps be the better word — to buy or to sell. In this case it is most important that the person giving the instructions should make it very clear whether or not he leaves anything to the discretion of his correspondent. In nine cases out of ten it is expedient that this should not be done. If possible, the instructions should be clear and explicit in order to avoid misunderstandings and through them loss.

I can cite a specific case in which failure to be thus explicit not only involved failure to make a large profit, but actually entailed a heavy loss; and I have no doubt that every business man of wide experience can match my story with many others. A firm in Japan shipped to London, England, a large quantity of the very best crude camphor, at a time when the British government was making experiments with smokeless powder, an important ingredient of which was gum camphor. When the consignment reached London, the price was so high that a profit of £12,000 sterling, nearly \$60,000, could have been made. The consignees advised the consignors by telegram that they believed the price would go higher. The latter replied, "You had better sell." The former assumed from this that selling or holding was left to their discretion, and they held. The consequence was that instead of making a handsome profit the consignors had to bear a loss of over £2,000 sterling, nearly \$10,000. The importance of being explicit is very clear.

5. The Letter is Politely Mandatory

Such a letter will rarely be written to any one who is not in the employ of the writer. Being mandatory means, of course, a command to do a certain thing or not to do something else. Great caution should be observed in writing such a letter, for human beings are all more or less sensitive, and even the fresh young salesman who has not yet had the opportunity to prove his worth, cannot like to have an order given to him as if he were a slave or a common navvy working on a railroad. In business correspondence the opinion of Admiral Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., of H.M.S. "Pinafore" fame, may well be considered: "For I hold that on the seas the expression 'If you please' a particularly gentlemanly tone implants." The employer undoubtedly has the abstract right to command his employees to do his bidding. He need not leave one single thing to a subordinate's discretion, but he can easily express his command in such a way as to make his meaning clear and secure prompt and implicit obedience without hurting anybody's feelings; and the smoothness which such consideration brings

about is worth careful attention by every employer.

6. Bankers', Merchants', and Others' Styles

The correspondence of bankers may be of very wide range. If the business is restricted to pure and simple banking, it rarely passes beyond the advice of remittances, or to drafts drawn, or collections to be made. Sometimes even such a banker will have occasion to make an investment for himself or a client. But nearly all of such correspondence is done with blanks that have been reduced to the smallest possible use of words. When, however, the banker's business takes on a wider range, there may easily be created a correspondence which has much of literary merit in it. Yet even in this case clearness, conciseness, and explicitness are of the utmost importance. As nearly as possible all danger of misunderstanding should be eliminated. The correspondence of some of the great banking-houses of Great Britain and the United States is a model for scholars of every class. The merchants' style should likewise be marked by care to avoid misunderstandings and to impart information with as few

words as possible. Manufacturers, industrialists, railroad officials, and other public-utilities officers have to consider at least two phases of correspondence: the one relates to the details of their business, and in this "Brevity is the soul of wit"; the other is usually placed under charge of an advertising agent, and to him is permitted a measure of discursiveness which almost passes beyond the scope of true business style.

CHAPTER V

OBSTACLES TO BE OVERCOME

1. Tendency to be too Lengthy

THE practical business man, who has had long experience in writing letters with his own pen or in dictating to a stenographer, will be disposed to smile at the mere suggestion that this could possibly be a fault which there is the least danger of his committing. Yet a long experience and opportunity to examine business correspondence in various parts of the world justify the statement that it is an error which even the best business man sometimes commits; but it is always due, in this case, to a great desire to make a strong impression upon his correspondent, or to accomplish some purpose which he has very much at heart.

Verbosity, however, may safely be said to be a fault which is far more likely to appear in the letters of Germans and Frenchmen than in those written by English-speak-

ing business men; and of those last mentioned, too lengthy letters are more frequently found to have come from our cousins across the Atlantic than from the business offices of the United States of America.

To the beginner and those who have not had much experience, the caution may very well be given, "Do not let your letters be too long." This fault may be avoided by practising either of two methods: first, by giving a few moments to careful thought of what is to be said; second, by letting each important subject have its own separate letter carefully thought out.

2. Faults of Diction

It is astonishing how frequent these are in the correspondence of some of our largest and longest-established business-houses. They are, it is sad to state, most conspicuous in the letters of those who have had a course of instruction in some of our business colleges, and the reason has already been suggested by what has been said of the neglect, in some of those schools, of practical work in composition and grammar.

It is almost impossible to recommend any good collection of "model letters," simply

because there is nothing which satisfactorily fills the requirements. There are scores of such books, it is true, but they are a good deal like the "phrase-book," and "guide to practical conversation" in a foreign language. In the latter the anxious American, who wishes to ask for something particular, will too often find sentences that are utterly useless to him in his momentary predicament, and rarely just the one which fills his exact, pressing need.

It is with letter writing very much as it is with meeting the difficulties of speech in a foreign language: the man who wishes to talk French must learn how to do it and make his own sentences; the letter writer must learn the correct form of grammar and rhetoric, and then he may compose his letters with little danger of faulty diction. He will, with practise, see that even in business correspondence a well-phrased letter is far more likely to accomplish its purpose than is one which offends the eye and the ear by mistakes of grammar and composition; that desirable brevity, which is always commendable, should not be attained by omissions which give the letter an undeniable appearance of disagreeable brusque-

ness, and other faults of diction that may easily be avoided.

3. Intrusion of Personality

Another way to express what is meant by this caption is: "Do not let a business letter be too much of what 'I' think or say." Of course, when the letter gives definite information as to what price the writer will pay for a certain article, or what his selling price is for something else, it is perfectly right and proper to say what *I* or *we* will do; nothing else can exactly fill the requirements of the case. But there are thousands of times when the correspondence takes the form of a discussion, and there is an exchange of opinions as to what is right or wrong in connection with a certain matter. An inquiry, let us say, is made as to the most desirable material for constructing a bridge. Full particulars as to length, purpose, etc., have been supplied from the inquirer; and now comes the question as to the exact character of the structure best suited for the case, the material, and other points. Is it wise to assume that the inquirer is entirely ignorant of the first principles of bridge construction,

and for the expert to say that he would do thus and so, in a manner which rather more than implies that this is the only thing to be done in the case? It seems hardly necessary to give an answer to the question; and yet I have seen many letters in which the personality of the writer was made to appear so strongly and so offensively that a good opportunity to secure remunerative business was lost. This intrusion of personality too frequently makes a letter read like an advertisement, in which the merits of a cart-wheel are set forth in such a way as to cause it to appear that the maker of this particular cart-wheel is the only person in all the world who has the faintest notion of how to put the various parts of a cart-wheel together.

4. Confusion of Matter

Such a fault is always improper; and it is a fault that is more likely to occur in letters which are dictated to a stenographer than in those which are written by the hand of the business man himself. The principal reason for this is, of course, something which might truthfully be called laziness. It is not at all unnatural that the

person who is dictating may, so to speak, think in parentheses, and that the parenthetical expression may assume such proportions as to obscure the principal sentence. Opportunity to examine correspondence from various parts of the world brings out the fact that this fault is more noticeable in business letters from England than in those written in our own country. Yet in the United States the fault is somewhat more conspicuous in letters from smaller towns and villages than it is in those which come from the large business-houses of the great cities. This may doubtless be accounted for by the fact that the merchants of the commercial centers are usually specialists in their operations, confining themselves to one line of goods and sometimes even to one particular article, while the country merchant must of necessity deal with almost everything. When the letter is carefully considered before being put upon paper, this danger of confusion is greatly reduced, if not entirely overcome; and this is an added reason for this preliminary.

Too much importance cannot be attached to the caution not to let any matters which are entirely irrelevant creep into a para-

graph. It is not at all likely that this fault will appear in the correspondence of an experienced person, but it is not for such that this book is prepared. The inexperienced letter writer may see no impropriety in making his letter a combination of business with personal, social, and general — even political — matters; but such a preference is in bad taste, and also tends to waste valuable time.

5. Danger of being Stilted or too Simple

If any one reads the correspondence of our ancestors who were engaged in business, there will be found a curious style of expression, and a use of words and phrases that have a "grand" sound, but fail to satisfy our ideals of what is good correspondence style nowadays. This is often what is called "stilted." If a business man permits himself to write letters which sound, when read, like the pulpit utterances of a renowned theologian discoursing to a congregation of eminent schoolmen, or which resemble the didactic periods of an abstruse professor enlarging upon the phenomena of organic life and inorganic basic elements, his customers will certainly

declare him to be a candidate for admission to an insane asylum instead of a man with whom they care to transact business.

The above sentence has been purposely written as an example of the stilted style to which we are opposed for business correspondence. On the other hand, no business man likes to have himself addressed in a letter as if he were the newest pupil in the first-year primary class that has just passed from the alphabet into the "I see a cat," "Do you see the cat?" reading-lesson. There is a great opportunity for the business man to display his shrewdness in adapting his correspondence to the mental attainment of those to whom he is writing. In this matter a great many valuable suggestions may be secured from the skilful traveling-salesman, who meets the customers at their offices, and can get a clear idea of just how they like to be addressed in letters, or how far advanced they are in ability to read and answer such letters.

PART III
PUBLIC BUSINESS

CHAPTER I

OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE

1. Diplomatic Correspondence

ANY business man whose range of enterprise has passed beyond the borders of the United States is likely to find it necessary to communicate by letter with one of the departments of some foreign government. When it seems advisable, or if it becomes necessary, to write such letters, the first step is to ascertain whether or not such correspondence between a private individual and a department of government is permitted; for it is probable that a majority of the governments of important states do not allow this. If, however, it is permitted, then it is important to ascertain just what formalities must be observed.

This needed preliminary information can be obtained in three ways: first, by applying to our own Department of State; but, strange as it may seem, this is often the least satisfactory method of accomplishing

what is desired. Second, by asking our own diplomatic representative in the capital of the country with which correspondence is to be conducted to supply forms and to give useful suggestions; but here, again, the business man is not at all certain of getting what he wishes, for many of those despotic representatives quite frequently stand upon their dignity, and insist that their one function is to conduct correspondence between their own government and that to which they are accredited. When this proves to be the case, the business man may turn to the Consul-General, whose duty it is to render assistance if the same appears to him to be in the line of his duty. Probably this is the best way of all to secure the desired information; but even it is not infallible. The third and last way is for the business man to "take the bull by the horns" and write direct to the proper minister of the foreign government. There are a number of books which give the names of the cabinet officers of all organized governments in the world. The "Statesman's Year Book" and the "Almanach de Gotha" may be mentioned.

When the proper person has been de-

terminated, the importance of formality can hardly be exaggerated. It is always well to use unruled paper of what is called legal cap size. This is very much the same as foolscap. The post-office address of the writer being given in full and in the proper place, and the date written, the next word is *Sir*, or *Your Excellency*, or whatever may be the proper title to give to the minister. This preliminary word of address is written at the left-hand side, leaving a very wide margin. It is so unusual to address the official at the beginning of a letter (which in this case is often dignified by the title of "Despatch") that it is perfectly safe never to do it. Then the writer proceeds to say, *I have the honor to request*, and goes on to state his case, following this preliminary with whatever request for information he may wish to make.

There cannot be too minute subdivision into paragraphs. The despatch is brought to a close in the most formal manner, somewhat thus: *I have the honor to be* on one line; *Your Excellency's* or *Your Lordship's* or *Your Highness'*, on the next line, and *Obedient Servant*, on the next. The signature comes on the next line. Leaving a

space of about two lines, at the left-hand margin is written *To*; then, on the next line, preliminary titles, name, and heraldic titles; on the next line the official designation; followed, on the succeeding lines, by the address of the official.

2. To Cabinet Officers and Others

When a business man has occasion to write to one of our President's cabinet officers, it is well to use the same legal cap paper, although this is not so imperatively necessary as in the case of correspondence with foreign statesmen. Again, the style of address is either *Sir* or *Your Excellency*; the despatch is closed in the same formal way, and the address of the official is stated in full at the bottom of the page. When a communication is sent to one of our ambassadors, it is proper to preface the individual name with *Honorable* (and there seems to be no substantial objection to abbreviating this into *Hon.*). If the official is a military officer, the proper military title *may* be used, although authorities differ upon this point; many admirable writers say that the highest title always obliterates, for the time being, any lower title which

may be used in addressing a person. Since the diplomatic representative of the government is supposed to be of higher official rank than a military officer, it is evident that, if we observe this rule, the lower title should not be used.

After the personal name come the letters which denote academic degrees, etc. The popular style of an ambassador is *Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the United States of America*. A minister is *Envoy extraordinary and Minister plenipotentiary*. Sometimes, as is the case with many smaller states, our diplomatic representative is merely *Minister Resident*.

It is not proper to address even a consul-general as *Honorable*. A consul-general or consul is *William Adams, Esquire, Consul General (or Consul) of the United States of America*.

Should occasion arise for writing a letter to the President of the United States, he is addressed simply as *Sir*, and the letter is closed in this way: *The President, Washington, District of Columbia*. Here, again, there is a slight difference of opinion, some authorities contending that we should insert in this address either *Executive Mansion*

(*White House* is doubtful) or *Official Residence*. The reason why the personal name of the President should not be used is that the individual disappears in the office, and it is the President of the United States to whom the despatch is addressed. Indeed, it has been officially declared that the President of the United States is not a personality at all. When it becomes necessary to speak or to write of the *individual* who, for the time being, fills that office, he should be simply *Mr. Woodrow Wilson*, and when he retires from office he becomes only the citizen, *Mr. Woodrow Wilson*. It is not proper to use any other title.

Correspondence with the officials who are at the head of administrative departments of our own or foreign governments, or who represent us diplomatically or commercially in other countries, should always be more or less formal and stately. These characteristics, however, diminish in degree of dignity from the highest, let us say the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who corresponds to our Secretary of State, as we go down to a consul, or even lower, to a commercial agent. When occasion calls for a communication to be ad-

dressed to a diplomatic or commercial representative of a foreign government in this country, it will be manifest to all that a corresponding formality should be observed and a similar dignity conferred upon the official as has been indicated in other cases.

One precaution may be inserted here, and that is to write on one side of the paper only.

CHAPTER II

CIVIL AND MUNICIPAL SERVICE

I. Borough or Town Officials

THERE will be many occasions when the business man, the professional man, the ordinary citizen, and persons of every class, will find it necessary to write letters to the chief official of the town in which they live. If it is a borough or small town, it is quite likely that the Burgess or Chairman of the Town Council will stand upon his dignity, and it is quite right that his position should be respected. In communications of this kind local custom must be the main determining factor as to how the official should be addressed: in some places he would be offended if he were not given the title of *Esquire*, because he does exercise, sometimes at any rate, the duties of a squire or petty judge; in other places that same *Esquire* would be just as likely to arouse indignation, because it would be misinterpreted as an effort to curry favor by being

obsequious. But whatever title may be given to the head official of the community, the letter itself cannot be written in too simple, straightforward language, because it often happens that the burgess' or chairman's associates are, if not absolutely unlettered, not highly educated. Yet simplicity does not mean childishness, for such would be a needless affront. Suggestions as to ways of writing letters to the mayor and officials of a city can best be given by specimen letters; such will be found in the Appendix.

2. Letters to County Officials

In this case the dignity of the person to whom the communication is addressed must be carefully borne in mind. Another thing to be remembered is the fact that customs differ very much in the various parts of our country. In New England, for example, these county officials have a certain inheritance from early colonial days, when more importance and greater dignity attached to their office than is found to be the case today; nevertheless they expect their position to be recognized. In the western part of our country it need hardly be stated that most of the sheriffs, for example, would

think that the writer of the letter had some improper scheme in his mind if he were to employ the dignified forms of correspondence which are quite proper, and even commonplace, in other parts of the country.

When the time comes for a private individual to address a county official, it is well for him to ascertain exactly what is the official title of the person to whom he is going to write. This may seem almost too trivial a matter to mention here, but it is a bright example of the importance of small things.

In order to give a precise and clear illustration of what the writer of business letters to county officials must consider, let us take as an illustration the old Commonwealth of Virginia. A county is divided into magisterial districts, the number varying from three to eleven. The voters of the district elect a supervisor, and these collective supervisors make the county board of supervisors, which represents the county as a corporation, managing its property and business, levying taxes, auditing accounts, and disbursing funds. It recommends to the circuit court the individual to be appointed county surveyor and county super-

intendent of the poor. Each county elects also a treasurer, a sheriff, an attorney, one or more commissioners of the revenue, and a clerk of the circuit court. Each magisterial district elects, besides, a supervisor and justices of the peace, a constable, and an overseer of the poor. Suggestions as to the method of addressing letters to these various county officials will be given in the Appendix.

3. Letters to State Officers

In a little book to which the writer gave a great deal of time and trouble this statement is made: "It is known to everybody that titles are in disfavor in the United States." I do not give the title of the book or the writer's name, because I have no desire to have the man contradicted or his work ridiculed. Yet without some explanation the statement is altogether inaccurate. The writer, of course, meant titles of nobility, *Prince, Duke, Your Lordship*, etc. It is certainly known to everybody that other titles are very much in favor in the United States, and it is a pity that this is so. It ought to be quite sufficient to address an envelope *Mr. George White, Governor*,

Harrisburg, Penn., and to begin the enclosed letter, *Dear Mr. White*. But this is considered to be not sufficient.

I am here brought up against an extremely awkward problem. Each of our States is represented in two ways: there are the governor, the lieutenant-governor, the important officials of the administration, as well as the members of the legislature. All of these represent the people, and are to be considered in matters social and epistolary, that is, correspondence. But the people are also represented in the national legislature by United States senators and members of Congress. Of course the two sets of officials will never actually clash in the matter of taking precedence one before the other, because the governor and the others named with him are local, while the senators and representatives are officially recognized only in the District of Columbia. If I speak of national representatives first, it is not because I consider them entitled to any special precedence. A senator may be addressed as *Honorable Boise Penrose, Senator of the United States*, and when Congress is not in session, but he is in residence at Washington, his post-office address may

follow: during the sitting of Congress *Honorable Boise Penrose, United States Senator, Washington*, is sufficient. Of course, when it is known that Senator Penrose is at some other place, the title is the same, but the post-office address is whatever it may be.

The address of the governor of the State is *His Excellency, John K. Tener, Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, The Capitol, Harrisburg, Penn.* Other forms of address will be found in the proper place.

Formality, precision, dignity, and clearness should all be given careful attention in writing to any of the local or representative State officials.

CHAPTER III

LETTERS FOR PUBLICATION

I. Treatment of "Copy"

RATHER amusingly, all manuscripts from the pencil or pen, or copied out on the typewriter, or printed matter which has been clipped from a book, magazine, or newspaper and is intended to be reprinted as part of another article, is called, technically, "copy." This copy is given to the compositor and by him set up in type.

The first thing to be remembered in preparing copy is that it must never be written on both sides of the paper. Whether written by hand, copied by the typewriter, or a page of a magazine or another book, it should conform to this rule. An exception may be made when resetting a long article that is to be taken from a book or a magazine, and of which it is impossible or impracticable to get two sets. Even in such a case some printers demand that the copy

shall be prepared according to rule before it is sent to the compositor.

We are here considering ordinary pen-written copy, which is to be prepared by some one who is quite unfamiliar with the mechanical requirements of the printing-office. The handwriting should be legible, and if this requirement is attended to it does not matter very much how small the handwriting is.

Editors' demands for their compositors vary a great deal as to the form of their copy: some will not tolerate anything but typewritten copy, with a broad margin at the left hand, and wide spacing between the lines; others are less exacting. The space between the lines should be wide enough to enable the compositor to "follow back" to the next line without serious danger of setting up again the line which he has just finished. For a compositor is too often little more than a machine: he does not read what he is setting up; it is sufficient for him to get the letters in the order they have in his copy. It rests with the proofreader to see that the copy has been adhered to strictly.

2. A Letter about Business Matters for a Newspaper

We may consider this section from two standpoints: first, the letter writer himself takes the initiative; second, the editor of the newspaper has asked for a contribution in the form of a letter. In the first case it is just about as likely that the letter is a complaint about something in local administration or civic requirements, or a protest against something which the writer believes to be unfair, as it is anything of a more pleasing nature. The writer of a letter to a newspaper will, if he is properly thoughtful of others, first take the trouble to see just how such communications are "set up" in the columns of the journal for which he purposes to write, and will be guided thereby in preparing his own manuscript. This is not really essential, however, because each newspaper composing-room has its own rules, and no matter how the copy may be sent in, the compositor will undoubtedly conform to rules, even if the editorial department has not done the necessary editing.

When the letter writer has decided upon what he purposes to say, he should give the

same careful attention to dividing his matter into subjects and paragraphs as has been suggested in other cases. He will then give some thought as to how he should express his views, and it is of the same importance here as in any other case that clearness, directness, and brevity should be considered. Any one who reads at all regularly a daily journal in the columns of which people are encouraged to express their satisfaction with certain matters, their dissatisfaction with many others, their protests against the unfair treatment of prejudiced officials or "grinding monopolies," must have noticed that in a great many of these letters the writer seems not to know exactly what he wishes to say, and even when there is a suggestion of what he is driving at, he expresses himself so badly that other people will not take much trouble to read his effusions. The same cautions are appropriate when a business man has been asked to contribute an article; only, in this case, the general make-up of the manuscript will be judged more leniently.

PART IV
SOCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

CHAPTER I

THE FROTH OF SOCIETY

I. Invitations and Answers

THE first of these, invitations, range from the sumptuous engraved card down through an almost infinite variety to the most informal communication written on a post card. In the United States we are, happily, not favored with the display of imperial, royal, heraldic arms and titles which burden our friends in many other lands. Even our President does not "command" those whom he purposes to have as guests at the White House table.

At other White House social functions the invitation usually recognizes the Chief Magistrate's consort, if he is a married man, although this is not an inflexible rule. *The President and Mrs. Wilson at home* conveys a much coveted summons. The need for a reply exists only when the invitation is to the President's table, or some other entertainment which is practically the

same as in any other household, and then the writer is particular to be both formal and respectful.

It is hardly necessary to tell intelligent readers that the invitations to a definite entertainment, at which it is either necessary or convenient for the host or hostess to have some idea of the number who will be present, must be answered. In all cases when there can possibly arise a doubt, it is but considerate on the part of the entertainer to indicate her or his pleasure by the simple *An answer is requested*, or by the abbreviation *R. S. V. P.* This, expanded, is French: *Répondez, s'il vous plaît*, "Reply, if you please." But the use of the abbreviation or the French phrase is properly decreasing. Answers must conform to the style of the invitation itself: formal *Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Tufthunter accept with pleasure*, down to the chummy *Dear Jack* or *My dear Jill*.

2. Plans for Social Meetings

These, as here considered, generally have to do with the gathering together of the members of a club and their families, or something of a similar kind. Not infre-

The Froth of Society

quently the invitation to take part is accompanied by a request for a contribution toward a fund to defray expenses, or a notification that admission will be by ticket to be had for a fixed price. In cases where exact knowledge or previous experience teaches what is to be done, it may be proper to give no definite answer; still, as it is always safe to err on the right side, it is well to send an answer when there is a possible doubt.

Clubs, associations, and the like usually hold to one form, and issue their invitations in the association named or through its secretary. The answer will, of course, be addressed just as the invitation indicates. In clubs, guilds, and associations which are not so distinctly of a social character, the invitation is, in nine cases out of ten, written by a member who is the secretary (possibly chairman or president), and gives the service gratuitously. Inasmuch as this service is always more or less burdensome and frequently so distasteful that it is the most difficult matter to get a member to fill the position, it ought to be evident to all that an invitation coming in this way is entitled to an answer which should be ex-

pressed in a friendly and appreciative manner, but which should never be allowed to verge upon the familiar.

When a member feels called upon to write a letter to his club, society, guild, or whatever the sodality may be, care should be taken to address the proper person in the right way, always remembering that inasmuch as such official communication must, in the nature of things, become somewhat common property, its language and construction should be properly guarded.

3. Correspondence with Club Members

As a rule, this is of such a purely formal nature that frequently it is fully provided for by blank forms. The date and the signature are not in the least troublesome, for when the latter is not the printed name of the club secretary, the signature of the officer who is designated for the purpose is to be written. There should, however, be an intimation as to the position of the signer, which is generally indicated by *Miss*, in a bracket, or if the person is a married woman, by *Mrs. John Jones*, also in a bracket. Other blanks are filled in without difficulty.

There are, then, but two points to be considered, and these are certainly important. Giving place to the ladies, let us first consider a woman's club. Notices, letters, all communications from a club to its members should be addressed to *Mrs. Mary J. Olive*, or *Miss Ruth Seymour, Madam*. Very precise authorities contend that the form *Madame* is French, and therefore must not appear in English correspondence; but probably just as many use the *Madame* as the *Madam*. The envelope is directed to *Mrs. George W. Olive*, provided the woman is not a widow. When her husband is dead, there is no question as to the propriety or impropriety of continuing to address her by his name: it never should be done; yet the emphatic personal preference of the individual is sometimes weakly respected. But there is one form, illustrated by *Mrs. Judge Jones* or *Mrs. Admiral Smack*, that should not be tolerated, no matter who demands it.

In a men's club the form to be used in addressing civilian or lay members is to be determined by usage: it will be *Mr.* or *Esq.* Professional titles are usually and quite properly respected. A majority of people are in favor of the rule adopted by the

National Academy of Science: in notices and communications to its members all titles are dropped except the simple one of *Mr.*

4. Correspondence Generally

Here is to be noted the exception intimated in a previous section, where it was contended that every one to whom a letter or note may be sent is entitled to some term of courtesy or respect. But suppose it becomes necessary for *Mrs. Marshal Neptune* to send a note to *Dinah Tolliver* about the week's washing? It can hardly be contended that *Mrs. Neptune* is to commence her note *Mrs.*, or *Miss, Dinah Tolliver, Dear Madam*; and the more familiar and friendly forms are even less to be considered. This situation is dealt with in this way: *Mrs. Neptune wishes Dinah Tolliver to come to her house at seven o'clock next Monday morning to get the wash-clothes.* When *Mr. Neptune* finds it desirable to have the garden dug up and prepared for the spring planting of seeds, he too adopts the third-person style, and writes: *Mr. Neptune wishes Dan McCarthy to come on Wednesday next to work in his garden.*

Some of the "colored ladies and gentle-

men" are disposed to resent this cutting off of *Mrs.*, *Miss*, and *Mr.*, but their protest must be ignored. The words "ladies" and "gentlemen" were long ago brought down from their high place, and even now they are too frequently dragged in the mire, when "the garbage gentleman" comes to inquire if "the laundress lady" will accompany him to the ball to be given by "the United Brethren of the Grand Order of Shining Sons of Ephraim."

In social correspondence generally great care should be taken not to double up titles improperly. In continental Europe there is practically no objection to this; a man is *Herr-Doctor-Professor X*, and as many heraldic titles are prefixed and academic degrees added as he can claim. In Great Britain also this is somewhat the case. In the United States this objectionable custom is spreading a little, although there is still a strong objection among sensible men to mixing up judicial, military, or professional titles with academic designations.

CHAPTER II

THE PITFALLS OF SOCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

1. To whom are you writing and about what?

THE question may seem to be a very simple one, so much so as to excite a smile of complacency. But it is not by any means such an easy thing for a letter writer to determine exactly to whom he or she is writing. I recall the case of an American resident in Japan who wished to get certain information. He was told by a native friend that he should apply to the minister of education. The official's name was given. The Japanese friend naturally assumed that an American who had been graduated from a college in his native land, had wandered so far away from home, and was presuming to teach the English language in Japan, knew something about the usages of society.

Now it should be borne in mind carefully that the proper title of this official, when

given in its nearest English equivalent, is "His Imperial Majesty's Minister of State for Education"; that he is a member of the Mikado's cabinet; and that the Mikado is an hereditary monarch, who is considered by all of his subjects to be the representative on earth of an unbroken line of sovereigns, "descended through ages eternal" from the gods themselves. As some of His Majesty's glory shines upon his cabinet, it is evident that the Minister of Education is rather an impressive person. He is properly addressed as *Excellency*.

My American friend, totally ignorant of social conventions at home and, of course, utterly at a loss as to what he ought to do abroad, used some ordinary note-paper; began his letter, *My dear Mr. Sato* (of course *Sato* was not the Minister's name!); wrote in the familiar way that he would have used in corresponding with his neighboring farmer in Kansas; and closed the letter, *Yours sincerely*. That ignoramus got off very easily in merely having his letter ignored entirely, for it was quite within the rights of the Minister to summon the offender to his office in Tokyo and give him a lecture on the propriety of correspond-

ence. This amusing episode ought, possibly, to have been alluded to in the chapter relating to official correspondence; but my friend seemed to think he was doing something entirely social, and his stupidity is a warning to others, that they first make sure to whom they are going to write and what they wish to say.

2. The Form of Letters, Notes, Invitations, and Answers

We are considering social correspondence, which has nothing to do with business, buying and selling, building and tearing down. Beginning with letters of introduction: these may be considered as of several types or classes. First, there is the very formal business letter: this amounts to nothing more than an identification. It is not supposed to give the bearer any social claim upon the addressee: indeed its function is pretty nearly the same as a passport without any of the latter's benefits.

Second, there is the perfunctory letter of introduction which, for any one of a score of reasons, has to be given because it has been requested. This is most common in business circles and is assumed to mean al-

most nothing. Sometimes the bearer of such a letter asks for club and social introductions which are politely evaded, and the addressee declines all such responsibility.

Third, there is the warm, sincere, private letter of introduction, that literally means what it says in asking the addressee to do for the bearer just what would be done for the writer. The bearer of a letter of introduction, no matter to what class it belongs, is assumed not to read it; when he presents it, he sends his card with it, and the manner of the addressee will make it plain to a person of ordinary intelligence just what the tone of the letter was.

Social notes range from the most formal style of composition to the very friendliest, and this type of correspondence permits of great variety in stationery; but it will be found that cultured people do not approve of the extremes in color, embossing, and the use of heraldic devices which are affected by some. As a general rule, persons of good taste are satisfied with a monogram, or a scroll, or a neatly engraved address. Invitations, as has already been intimated, range from the engraved form: *Major-General and Mrs. Walter Scott request your*

presence at the marriage of their daughter, Mabel, to Lieutenant William Grant, United States Army, and then follow the place, the date, and the hour, to the formal business card of identification. In cases where a large attendance is expected, and an attempt is made to be somewhat exclusive, an engraved card of admission is enclosed. Answers must conform in their style to that of the invitation: formal, friendly, or intimate, as the case may be.

3. What Information to impart and how to give it

Letters of any length are not considered here. There may be occasion to write something more than a mere note, but this is done to give information about some event of special importance, and the communication should never be at all discursive. The subject should be kept to very strictly, and the communication should be thoroughly consistent in its style as to first or third person. Even an invitation to a bridge party, when the affair is altogether informal, had better be concise and to the point. When it passes beyond this, it is a letter which will be considered in the next chapter.

A word of caution may very properly be given here as to the importance of making these purely social communications, whether invitations or answers, quite clear in the information to be imparted. If the hostess wishes her guests to come at three o'clock and stay until six, let her say so; and it seems to most people that this should mean what it says. But local custom will determine how literally this limitation of time is to be observed. In some places "three o'clock" means any time up to four or five, and the "six o'clock" is taken to give liberty to stay as long as the invited guest chooses to remain. That this is condemned by the best people of our largest social centers is the conviction of many competent authorities.

4. The Use of the First Person, Singular or Plural, marks the Friendly or the Formal

In the first case, such letters, notes, or invitations should begin somewhat thus: *My dear Mrs. Smith*, and its scope may include not only *Mr. Smith*, but *your daughters*, and when quite informal and friendly, even *your son*; it being customary to

mention the young people by their given names.

When the invitation comes from a married woman, not a widow, she uses the plural form: *We shall be pleased to have you dine with us*, at such an hour on such a date, and if there is to be a dance after dinner, the fact may be stated in the body of the invitation, always so when the invitation is friendly and informal, or intimated by the word *Dancing* below the signature and at the left-hand margin. Such an invitation imperatively demands an answer, expressed in the same tone as the invitation.

When the third person is used: *Mr. and Mrs. Smith present their compliments and, will be pleased, etc.*, great care must be taken not to deviate from the third person form. The same precaution must be taken in writing the answer, whether of acceptance or of regret, that is, declining. Nothing marks the inexperienced person more distinctly, and subjects her or him to ridicule so severely, as confusion in the use of the first and third person when writing an invitation or an answer thereto. To begin an invitation, *Mrs. Dahlgreen presents her compliments to Mrs. Armentrout, and requests the*

pleasure of her company at luncheon at one o'clock on Thursday, the fifteenth of June, nineteen hundred and thirteen, and then go on with I am expecting my old school-mate, Miss Jane Riverside, and I am anxious for you to meet her, is a mixture that cannot be tolerated. Some inexperienced persons think there is danger of confusion in using so many "hers," but this is needless apprehension.

CHAPTER III

LOVE LETTERS

I. An Elderly Man falls in Love with a Woman of Comparable Age, or with a Younger One

THERE is no law, legislative, social, or ethical, which forbids a woman taking the initiative in this delicate correspondence; but the unwritten law of custom seems to have decided that it is improper for a woman to declare her feelings with a view to matrimony. There are, of course, love letters of passion, but with such we have nothing to do in this book. In a love affair which has gone far enough with the elderly man to justify him in his own opinion and hopes, and to warrant him in declaring his feelings and asking a response, it will be, and it had better be, the man who makes the first overture to marriage.

We are likely to find the elderly swain somewhat held back by his timidity. The fire of youth is supposed to make the youth-

ful lover so confident in himself that very often he feels that he has but to ask for a girl's hand to secure it. But this self-complacency, often amounting to great vanity, is not infallibly restricted to youth; sometimes the older man is quite as presumptuous, not to say offensive, in this matter as is the youngster, yet we are writing for the general run of people, not for the exceptional.

First, then, let us assume that the man wishes to write to some one of about his own age. Both of them are certain to give more thought to the creature comforts of life than young people usually do. Therefore, after paying some tribute to the lady's personality, and perhaps touching upon the occasion when and the circumstances in which Cupid shot his bow with admirable precision, it will be advisable, in asking for the lady's hand in marriage, to give some specific information as to the writer's ability to provide his wife, if he is so fortunate as to secure one, with a home, comforts, and it may be even luxuries.

That the man's own personality and his merits may properly be depreciated is almost self-evident. But "faint heart never won

fair lady," and care should be taken that self-depreciation does not go so far as to become self-condemnation. When the elderly man writes to a much younger woman, the importance of apology for a seeming presumption and the almost absolute necessity for trying to make advantage of position or fortune offset (perhaps) disparity in ages, are of great importance.

**2. A Young Man expresses his Feelings to
a Girl of Appropriate Age**

It is probably true that in nine cases out of ten wherein two young people have gone on in their association to the point when the young man wishes to declare himself by letter, there will have been a gradual development of correspondence. Beginning with the absolutely formal "third-person style," when *Mr. A. presents his compliments to Miss B. etc.*, passing through the *My dear Miss B.*, *Dear Miss Alice*, progress will quite likely have gone on until the *Dear Prue* stage has been reached. In such a case there will certainly have been sufficient encouragement offered the young man to justify his assuming that his advances will not be spurned. The heartless

coquette and the conscienceless flirt are recognized as existing, but they are not entitled to consideration here.

It comes about, then, that the young, honorable man ought to consider his own material circumstances, as well as the home surroundings and expectations of the girl, and think well about possible sacrifices on her part before he lets his attentions become marked enough to deter other young men from showing polite attentions to the young lady, and before he writes that first real love-letter.

Nowadays our girls are divided into two classes: those who marry for love and all that this means; and those who marry for material gain. Fortunately, the number of the former class is so entirely disproportionate to that of the other as to make it hardly necessary for us to give any consideration to those who are willing to accept what has been most appropriately called "Gilded Slavery."

3. The Woman, Old or Young, replies

In the case of the elderly man of whom we have thought as writing a letter to some one who is of appropriate age, it seems as

if there should be little difficulty in an educated woman knowing just how to word her reply. Assuming that she has seen sufficient indication in the man's attitude and attentions to justify her in expecting something of the kind from him, she will perhaps have prepared herself for the situation. It then seems to be but a simple matter for her to determine whether she will make her reply affirmative, conditionally so, or negative.

But the case which we have imagined quite frequently occurs with those who are not sufficiently well prepared by education to know how to treat the matter. It is most important that the tone of the reply should be a dignified one, and that nothing should be said which may wound the sensitive man or over-flatter a vain one. In the case of a young woman she will probably ask assistance, or a suggestion at least, from her mother, or some older woman relative or friend who is competent to give useful advice. In the rare case of one who is entirely alone in such matters, it is most important that she should word her reply with the greatest circumspection. As we have indicated, probably the man who offers himself has been an acquaintance of some years'

standing, and the familiarity which this will indicate may sometimes be rather an embarrassment. In any case we should very earnestly disapprove of anything resembling extravagance or improper warmth of expression.

4. The Old and New Styles of Love Letters

It is most interesting and amusing to look at some of the printed love-letters which appear in the books of a hundred years ago. When these were written by educated men, they wander through the fields of classical literature, and the lady to whom they are addressed is given all the charm and attributes of the very fairest of the goddesses. Furthermore, the writer of the letter usually made himself out to be the very "worm of the dust," and self-depreciation really rivaled that of the people of eastern Asia when speaking of anything which belongs to themselves.

In the present day there is probably a very wide range in the style of composition adopted by the writers of tender and affectionate letters of the kind which we are now considering. Some of them are remarkably poetical, and quite as tender as

were those of the grandfathers and grandmothers of the writers. But this is rather a practical age, and even the masculine writer of a love letter is very likely to consider time as of some importance, so that he will therefore express himself with a directness which, after all, is most likely to be pleasing to the up-to-date young woman, who may be already a suffragette, or a club woman, or having many irons in the fire, so that with her, too, "time is money." Still it is hardly necessary to say that excessive warmth of expression is now thought to be rather bad "form." We find abundant justification for this opinion in the way most people have read the letters (of the kind which we disapprove) that have appeared in the newspapers as evidence or as indirect testimony in some of the sensational breach-of-promise cases, or sometimes in the unpleasant divorce suits.

5. The Correspondence develops in Intenseness

The first letter from the soliciting swain, whether he is the elderly man who has been mentioned, or the youthful lover, having been so blessed as to meet with a favorable

response, it is but natural to suppose that the correspondence will continue until the "consummation devoutly to be wished" has been reached. The assumption of this whole chapter has been that the two parties in interest are living in places so far apart that frequent calls by the man are not practicable. When the two are living in the same place, correspondence is naturally limited to brief notes, and these will, of course, express sentiments with gradually increasing warmth. When the parties are separated by such a distance as to make it necessary to use the mails, the correspondence will be of similar development in frequency and warmth of expression; but the letters will be of some length. It is hardly possible to give even a general suggestion as to the tone of such correspondence, for "love is blind," and it is not probable that the average writer of these letters will ever have in mind the remotest possibility of their being seen by any one but the person to whom they are addressed. Indeed, it may safely be said that the correspondence will now have reached that stage of intimacy and confidence that a suggestion from an outsider would be altogether out of place.

CHAPTER IV

FRIENDLY LETTERS

1. Parents to Children

ALTHOUGH "Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son" are still considered to be excellent models of their kind, yet we can hardly recommend such style to the parents of the present day. A father, as a rule, usually considers his part of this correspondence to be restricted to an occasional note to his sons; leaving more lengthy letters, and especially letters to daughters, to the mother. In addressing a child a man will naturally be satisfied with such an expression as *My dear John*, or *My dear Son*. After that the tone of the letter will depend entirely upon the matter to be considered, and the measure of intimacy that exists between the two. It sometimes happens that the father must write to his son in a reproving way, and when this disagreeable necessity occurs it is well to remember that

very often a written reproof has a more enduring effect than the spoken one. Therefore let a word of caution be given here that before putting the rebuke into writing the father give very careful consideration to the circumstances of the case, and as to just what he will say. That happiness, which is the most desirable thing in the whole world to be preserved in the family circle, must be safeguarded here in this matter of correspondence quite as much as in the personal intercourse of the home. There are many men who treasure letters from their parents as amongst their most precious belongings. In one particular case that comes to my mind, the letter was written by the mother to a son who had been so unfortunate as to incur severe discipline at the hands of his college faculty. The mother alluded to the young man's misdemeanor in the very gentlest manner and with but a few words; but she took from the episode a lesson as to the young man's future, and expressed herself in such a manner that not only was there repentance sincere and lasting on the son's part, but his future career was then and there decided upon entirely different lines from what his parents and he

had previously considered. There is, in this matter of letters from parents to children, such an infinite range of possibility that no outsider feels competent to offer anything like definite suggestion.

2. Children to Parents and Older Relatives

If the opportunity were given to read such correspondence, a very accurate opinion as to the existing relationship could be easily formed. In the case of a young man at college who has occasion to write to his father asking for something additional to his regular allowance, for the purpose of doing something that is not at all essential, it is easy to read between the lines, and from such reading to determine whether or not the youth really expects his father to grant his request. Again, when a young girl is away from home at a boarding-school, it is easy to think of a somewhat similar experience in her case, but now the letter will doubtless go to her mother; and again the character of the intimacy which should exist between the two is at once indicated by the tone of the letter. It therefore becomes very evident that the surroundings of the home will be indicated in this correspond-

ence. With letters from either parent to younger children, there is of course a tone which varies from the nursery language up to that which is proper for children who are partly grown. In the same way correspondence between children and older relatives is to be marked by the same consideration on the part of the young people for any peculiarity of the older ones. If we listen to the conversation of children nowadays, it must be admitted that altogether too frequently this is not always pleasing to the ears of their relatives and friends. We would not entirely suppress the forms of speech which are properly called "slangy," because, as Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes has said, there is something picturesque about slang which is not to be found in the precise language of those who are always guarded in their speech; although, as he said, we are in this matter a long way behind the ancient Greeks. But while we would not altogether disapprove of slang, yet it is well to give a very strong caution to young people that when they are writing letters to older people they should refrain from the use of anything approaching slang which may verge upon the vulgar. Another

thing that young people should try to remember is that every boarding-school, college, and university has its own peculiar language, which is often entirely unintelligible to those who are not connected with the institution or do not live in the same town. Now, when a boy or a girl is writing from such surroundings to a parent or an older relative, the letter should very carefully avoid this local form of speech.

3. Correspondence between Adult Relatives and Connections

Grown-up people, outside of the immediate family circle, are not, as a general rule, very liberal in the matter of writing letters. They are usually restricted to giving information as to some matter of importance, such as a birth, a marriage, or a death. In such cases the tone of the letter varies greatly. The style of address is very different according to locality, custom, or degree of intimacy which has existed between the parties to the correspondence. As a general rule, it is quite sufficient to begin such a letter with the phrase *My dear John*, although a good many people think, and quite properly, that if some relationship

exists, such as *Aunt, Uncle, Cousin*, etc., it is right to prefix the title of relationship. This is entirely a matter of individual taste. In the correspondence which is now being considered, the general opinion is that anything approaching extravagance in language should be avoided. The word *Dearest* is one that had better be discarded altogether from letter writing. A very good reason for cutting out this superlative expression was given by a married woman to her husband when he returned from an absence. He had written quite frequently, and had begun his letters thus: *My dearest wife*. It should be mentioned here, parenthetically, that the two had not been married very long, and that this had been the first separation in which there was any reason for writing. The wife, who had been a school teacher, said to her husband, *Why did you call me "dearest"? Do you not know that this is the superlative form of "dear"? When the word is used it means that there are certainly two more at least who are also "dear."* Now, when you call me your *"dearest wife"* am I to assume that you have at least two more wives somewhere else? This of course is only a witty story,

but nevertheless it contains a very excellent moral, and that is to avoid extravagance of language. Some very sarcastic person has said that we are all apt to express ourselves in superlatives. It has been declared that *wildly exciting, thrillingly gay, perfectly lovely*, is the order of the day.

4. Correspondence between Youthful Relatives and Connections

I think that if I really wished to pry into the secrets of two families who were related by blood or connected by marriage, or if I had any design upon the peace and happiness of two households who had no such connection but in which, whether relationship or merely acquaintance existed, there was a correspondence going on between two of the youthful members, I should try to have a look at the letters passing between those two young people; there would be the place to find whatever of gossip or betrayal of secrets, or the display of the family skeleton, would be most certain to exist. I fear that parents do not nowadays exert themselves sufficiently to induce (I was almost tempted to say "compel") brothers and sisters to keep up correspondence with

their absent brother or sister, and to write regularly and frequently to the junior member of the family who goes away from home to school or on a visit. This persuasion, or compulsion, should be exercised with those who are away. If more of this sort of correspondence were done, it seems to me that it would result in something like a revival of what some cynical persons continually declare is "the lost art of letter writing."

One reason for this opinion is a practical one, and there are many sentimental ones; it is that brothers and sisters are often just the kind of merciless critics whose remarks do more to correct evils in style and composition than all the harplings of a teacher or the persuasion of a parent can accomplish. Letters from brothers, sisters, and cousins are not only likely to exert a good influence in helping both correspondents to gain in style and expression, but they are almost sure to tell of home affairs in a way that will help the absent one to see how life at home may be made more pleasant and more "homey"; while the letters which the absent one writes are almost equally sure to exert a good influence.

But there is a word of caution to be spoken here, and that is to avoid all idle gossip and tale-bearing; for these never serve any good purpose. Let these letters be as intimate and communicative as possible, but avoid all "gush." They should be carefully arranged, mechanically; that is, the date given in its proper place, which—in this type of letter—may be either at the beginning or at the end, after the signature. Here I wish to condemn a habit which is thought by some to be rather "elegant": it is to write the day of the week without any date. This *may* be tolerated in a note which passes quickly (in the same day) from writer to receiver in the same place, and is supposed to be at once destroyed; but I think it should never be followed when a letter is written to go any distance, and the correspondence is really a *letter*. The other details of arrangement should be observed carefully, and whatever information is given deserves its proper share of consideration. No serious objection can be raised to the use of pet names or even nicknames, although these should not be carried too far. It is a good plan for these youthful correspondents to have a

dictionary at hand and to consult it frequently. That grammar and rhetoric must be carefully watched, and all slang which verges on vulgarity be avoided, does not need to be asserted.

CHAPTER V

FAMILIAR LETTERS

I. Correspondence between Adult Acquaintances

THERE are not many people who are favored by nature and qualified by experience and education to write such letters as those which passed between Edward ("Ned") Delaney and John ("Jack") Flemming, and which make up one of the most charming stories in American (or any other) literature, "Marjorie Daw." Other examples of almost ideal correspondence between two women, young or old, or a woman and a man, or two men friends, might be mentioned — there are plenty of them; but it is enough for my purpose to refer to Thomas Bailey Aldrich's masterpiece.

In this chapter it is intended to discuss only familiar and social letters. Business and official correspondence between individuals should conform, conditions being

duly considered, to the rules accepted as governing the correspondence of firms and corporations. The details of post-office address, place, and date are not yet absolutely and arbitrarily fixed, and probably never will be, since there cannot be a board of arbitration; yet consideration for others and good taste will surely suggest that there should be no obscurity about such matters, or abbreviations which may mislead. In the United States I think there is no great danger of confusion when, in a hasty, familiar note, a person writes "4/5/13"; it will be read "April 5, 1913." But in most parts of the British Empire it would be read "4th of May." All danger of confusion is avoided by refraining from such an abbreviation.

Very frequently, for this correspondence between adults (and younger persons as well), stationery is used which bears the writer's private address, or, in the case of a man, that of his club. The degree of intimacy that has been established between the parties will determine the mode of the personal address; whether it shall be *My dear Mr. Washington*, *My dear Washington*, or *Dear Tom*; yet care should be taken

that the note or letter is consistent throughout. It should be manifest to all that a communication which began in the first-mentioned style ought not to enter upon ground so familiar as that which should properly be trod only by such intimate friends as *Tom* and *Jack*. On the other hand, it would seem decidedly incongruous and stilted if *Tom* phrased some part of what is otherwise an entirely intimate letter in the same precise manner he would be expected to employ when writing to the president of his university.

There is yet one more matter to be considered. It is always possible that one of the parties to a familiar correspondence may achieve such a measure of literary or scientific or some other kind of fame as to lead to the publication of his letters. Is it not well, therefore, for adult acquaintances to give attention to the matter, the language, and the mode of expression followed in their letters? If the late Lafcadio Hearn had suspected that his letters (some of them, at any rate) might be published for the whole world to read in three large volumes, I imagine he would have been a little more guarded than he was at certain times.

Although I have written here of two men correspondents, it is needless to say that all applies equally to women, as well as to correspondence between a woman and a man, whether young or old.

2. Correspondence between Men and Women

Adults are, I fear, almost as likely to be indiscreet, nowadays, in familiarity as are younger persons. If the use of given names in the upper classes of society were indicative of Quaker simplicity, there would be no objection to raise; but it is not so. Amongst adults, as a rule, the bonds of matrimony will exercise restraint. Yet even this is not absolute; and there is, with English-speaking peoples on both sides of the Atlantic, altogether too little reserve in this respect, and the undue familiarity finds its way into notes and letters.

In this mixed correspondence a great deal of attention is quite properly given to stationery; and as regards this, as in all social affairs, good taste will prevent the use of that which is so conspicuous as to make it verge upon the vulgar. There is no fixed rule for placing the address and date line: and yet since, when these are engraved,

embossed, or printed, they appear near the top of the first or the fourth page, and are then *always* considered to begin the communication, it cannot be said that the consensus of opinion is not in favor of that place. Yet some who profess to be authorities say that a *written* communication which has *1727 Arch Street, Philadelphia, June 8, 1913*, in the upper, right-hand part of the beginning page, be it first or fourth, *must* be classed as a business letter; while that which commences at once with *My dear Mr. Jackson*, about one third the length of the page from the top and at the left-hand side, with the address and date after the signature, is entitled to be called a familiar, social letter or note. Since there is no agreement, I assume that each person is at liberty to decide for herself or himself.

The correspondence here considered is presumed to be between those who are generally spoken of as ladies and gentlemen; in other words, they are supposed to have both culture and education. They will not, therefore, deface their written communications with undue familiarity. Yet some of those who would hotly resent *not* being called "ladies and gentlemen," even if they

are not admitted into the charmed circle of the exclusive set, have frequent occasion to write to one another; and with some of these, too, there is a disposition to be unduly familiar, both in the use of given names and in the contents of the note or letter. This should be carefully watched; and as to anything which the French people call *risqué* (the English word "risky" is at least suggestive of the meaning!) it should be rigidly avoided.

Young women are taking altogether too much liberty in their correspondence with young men, and I am one of the old-fashioned people who think that a young girl should not allow herself to be led into such correspondence, and that all notes and letters from young men ought to be read by her mother, as well as the replies when such are permitted. Not until the girl's engagement has been announced should this rule be relaxed, and then only in favor of the young man to whom she is betrothed.

3. Correspondence between College Chums and Intimates

There are many men — and women — who treasure among their most precious

belongings some letters written by their classmates, with whom they held that intimate fellowship during the years of their academy, college, or university life which can come only from such association. We may go back many centuries in this account of men's letters, simply because the same educational advantages have not been furnished for women until quite recently; but now that women are almost—in certain places wholly—on equal terms with men in this matter of academic, or higher, education, we have also these chummy letters written by the feminine hand.

What is it that has given this special attraction to such letters? The answer comes quickly: it is because they reveal, sometimes almost expose nakedly, the character of the writer. I do not mean to say that this revelation is always attractive. It has been my misfortune to be compelled to read volumes of the letters of X., or Y., or Z., that were not only most disagreeably characteristic, but were entirely the composition of some shallow-minded, pretentious, often offensively precocious youngster, who had been flattered by mistaken relatives and friends until he was convinced that his letters were

destined to live in English literature as do those of truly eminent persons who wrote without thought of fame. It is needless to say that such volumes of letters as those I condemn were "printed for private circulation only"; they were never submitted for review in a reputable and representative journal.

This experience, and almost every literary man can duplicate it, gives us a hint as to what should be the foundation-stone of this correspondence. Let it be natural in conception and simple in expression; but do not assume that simplicity means the exclusion of ease and graceful periods. Yet do not strive for too much literary elegance; the moment this is attempted the strain becomes apparent, and the correspondent to whom such letters are written will have great difficulty in curbing his indignation. No stranger cares to be put, metaphorically, into the seats of the gallery-gods, to whom a ranting, melodramatic actor is addressing himself.

What follows now is addressed to young men especially, for reasons which must be obvious. Above all things, let these letters be pure and clean. I think it would be well

for every student — and every young man — to look over his letters to chums carefully, and if there is a word or phrase therein which he would not be glad to have his mother or sister read, let him destroy the letter mercilessly.

Even such familiar letters as are included in the consideration of this section should be constructed carefully, if for no other reason than the practise this gives, and because every lapse into carelessness is dangerous. If the students are taking the same course in English it is an excellent thing for each of the parties to the correspondence to criticize kindly the style and composition of the other. Care should be taken not to be captious or censorious: it is very easy to hurt the feelings of another in these ways.

Avoid using too many words; that is, do not stretch out a description with needless words; yet in this type of correspondence it is improper to go to the other extreme and to give the letter a commercial appearance by extreme conciseness and business brevity. An unpardonable fault in this type of correspondence is perfunctoriness, or the confession (by matter or expression) that there is nothing interesting to say, but the

writer feels obliged to fill a certain number of pages.

At a Yale commencement the secretary of the graduating class read the letters from absent members, or those who had not finished the course but had left the university in good standing. One of those letters betrayed this perfunctoriness by a clause something like this: "Please give my kind regards to all the fellows; and if any one of you is ever in New York City, I shall be glad to have him call on me!" This was received with shouts of derisive laughter, and it deserved to be.

Good taste in the selection of stationery — that which is appropriate for girls may not be for men, — in the mechanical arrangement of the parts of the letter, in the use of friendly or familiar names, in curbing the "ego," and in considering the tastes of the correspondent, contributes immensely to the gratification which these chummy and intimate letters may give.

4. Correspondence between School Boys and Girls

It is a shameful thing, but it is nevertheless true, that in many parts of this country

school boys and girls think it "smart" to use such extreme slang as to be positively vulgar, and sometimes actually indecent, when writing to their friends. I am sorry to say that this state of affairs is not confined to the backwoods or remote districts; but it is to be noted within a few miles of our educational centers, even in the largest cities, and in school districts where the public school education is the very best. It is due partly to carelessness, but principally to cowardice on the part of boys and girls who know better, but are afraid their companions will call them "prigs" if they speak and write correctly.

There is no objection to a little slang; sometimes it gives a touch of color to a sentence; but it is wise always to try to stop it, because when a statement is made in correct, idiomatic English, it cannot be made more emphatic or picturesque by distorting it into something that is as unfamiliar to many cultured people as would be a Chinese aphorism.

The important warning to be given school boys and girls, when writing letters to their friends and intimate companions, is to be correct in grammar and rhetoric, the use of

capitals, punctuation, and division into paragraphs. Another caution to be given is not to use extravagant language, which is not the same as slang. There is danger of making a sentence sound quite ridiculous to the reader because the writer permitted herself or himself to be carried away by momentary enthusiasm, and did not stop to think how it would seem to her "dearest Mary" to be told that so and so, at the party, wore "the most gorgeous gown that you ever saw in your whole life!" or to his "dear Tom" to be assured that somebody else's "new bicycle is the finest that ever was turned out of any shop on earth!"

When the school boy or girl has learned how to control the pen so that the particular fault which has just been mentioned will be avoided, the next thing is to be natural. Write, as far as possible, as if you were talking to your friend, but always try to remember whether or not that friend is as entirely familiar with your own surroundings as you are; if not, do not write about people with whom your correspondent is not acquainted or of places entirely unfamiliar to your friend, unless you give some description. The same caution may be given when

school work and daily occupations are discussed. When all these details have been carefully considered, some of the best letters I have read came from the pens of school boys and girls. There is no better way to improve one's English composition and to enlarge one's vocabulary than to engage in correspondence with some congenial friend of about one's own age; only, if improvement in these ways is to be the principal object, the letters must be such as to permit the receiver to show them to parent or teacher, in order to secure needed assistance in correcting faults; then such corrections must be passed on to the writer.

PART V
THE USE OF WORDS

CHAPTER I

THE RIGHT WORD IN THE RIGHT PLACE

I. The Right Word varies greatly with Circumstances

WE must consider here one sentence as the basis of this whole part. If the sentence is properly constructed, the whole composition of the letter will probably be satisfactory, because the letter is only a cumulation, or putting together, of sentences. In these there is not much choice left to the careful writer, so far as the position of the particular word is concerned.

There are many books of synonyms — a word having the same or similar significance, or meaning, as another — and at first glance it sometimes seems as if it were entirely a matter of personal preference which one of two, or even three or more, synonyms we shall use. Yet it will almost always be found that one of the synonyms, and only one, conveys our meaning better than any of the others.

Perhaps one of the most difficult words to place properly is "only." If my readers will take the trouble to read carefully almost any book which comes to hand — noting this little word particularly — they will find that very few writers always put this word in the proper place. It is almost always made to modify the principal verb of the clause; whereas, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, it actually modifies the dependent verb or clause, and that only.

For example, there are very few people who do not say: *I only came to ask how you feel today.* But that is not what they intended to say, because "only" is in the wrong place. The sentence should be: *I came only to ask how you feel today.* Look through books written by men, and women too, who are considered to be masters of English; and you will be astonished to find how careless they are about this matter. I give one concrete example that has just come to my notice. In an interesting and instructive little book about "The Vikings," by Allen Mawer, Professor of English Language and Literature in Armstrong College, University of Durham, England, is this sentence: "Later, as the result of peaceful

negotiations, they obtained permission to pass the bridges on condition that they *only* ravaged Burgundy, leaving the Seine and Marne districts untouched; thus had the provinces of the Frankish empire lost all sense of corporate union." The misplacing of "only" completely changes the meaning of the sentence. Evidently the author intended to convey the idea that it was Burgundy alone the Vikings were to ravage; but as the words stand, a strict interpretation means that they were to *ravage* only, they were not to do something else in or to Burgundy. For example, they were not to settle there permanently. The words "only" and "Burgundy" should be transposed, and the sentence read, "that they ravaged Burgundy only, leaving the Seine and Marne districts untouched."

Prepositions, too, are generally troublesome. You will find, if you look carefully, that many persons who really know better use the phrase "under the circumstances." What does "circumstances" mean? The dictionary tells us, "one's state in life; state of affairs." But it means a little more than that; it means "that which surrounds." How, then, can one be "under" that which

surrounds? The phrase should be *in the circumstances*.

Another very common misuse of prepositions is illustrated by the sentence: *Please take it in the other room*, when *Please take it into the other room* is intended. I need only call attention to the utterly indefensible sentence: *Open the door, the cat wants in*, to have my readers understand that what is intended to be expressed is, *The cat wishes to come in*.

2. The Right Word is not always Easy to pick

The poet, Alfred Tennyson, was once complimented by an ardent admirer who had just read "In Memoriam." This friend and admirer referred to one particular passage, and declared vehemently that it bore the unmistakable mark of genius. He concluded by saying: "No one but a born poet could have written that line; and to such an one even it would come as an inspiration—in a flash!" Tennyson replied very calmly: "Well, I don't know about the genius and the flash of inspiration; but I can assure you I worked for three days

over that line, and smoked at least twenty cigars before I got just the right words in the order that suited me!"

Dictionaries, books of synonyms, and of synonyms differentiated, are most helpful; but, after all, it is careful thought with practise which enables us to pick the right word. Let us think for a few minutes of the two words "want" and "wish." They are not true synonyms at all. The former should be used strictly to mean that which we desire, and at the same time something which is also necessary or essential. For example, we *want* food, we *want* fresh air, and many other things; even if a poet has said: "Man *wants* but little here below, nor *wants* that little long." It is not correct to say: "I *want* you to go to the post-office for me," or "I *want* to hear Caruso sing." *Wish* may properly be restricted to a desire, therefore it is right to say "I wish to go fishing tomorrow." But *wish*, in such a sentence, implies some uncertainty; so that it is not entirely satisfactory until the condition is expressed, something like, *if the weather permits, if I can get permission*, or something of the sort. It is much better to make the sentence a true English one and

say: *Unless something stops me, I am going fishing tomorrow.*

There is another class of words which may properly be mentioned here. They are called *homonyms*, and the definition given in the dictionary is "a word which agrees in sound with another, but has a different meaning." These English homonyms are especially troublesome for Americans or Britons who have not received much education; and they are particularly so for foreigners. For example, *bow*, the forward part of a ship or boat; *bow*, a salutation; *bough*, a small branch of a bush or tree; and then there is *bow*, a weapon. When the sound *b-o-w* is heard, those who are entirely familiar with the English language readily determine which *bow* is meant by listening to the other words that are used with *bow* or *bough*. These associated words are called "the context." In writing, it is not often that the person will be confused, because he knows his own context. But the choice of the right word becomes easy with practise. As a general rule, it is much better to choose the word that is truly English; that is, one which has come down to us from the Saxon rather than from the Latin

or Greek, either direct or through Italian or French. Furthermore, it is well to take the shorter of two words which are really synonyms.

3. The Right Word is like a Keystone

I have purposely used here what is called "a figure of speech" or "a figurative expression." That is to say, I have united in one sentence and compared things, *word* and *keystone*, which are entirely unlike, and naturally could not be associated, in order that I may illustrate my meaning in a somewhat striking way. The keystone, it will be remembered, is the central stone of an arch. It has a shape peculiar to itself, and it is set in place last of all. It is cut into such a shape that it presses downward and sidewise against the stones on either side, and thus gives to the arch that strength which is declared to be the greatest in any architectural or masonry form.

When once the keystone is properly made and correctly placed, the supporting framework of the arch may be removed; for, unless the weight placed upon the arch is sufficient actually to crush the stones, the more pressure there is the stronger does the arch

become. It will now appear why the right word in a sentence is like a keystone: it binds together all the others and completes the strength of the structure.

Moreover, the simile of the keystone and the right word is reasonable because many competent English writers agree with Lord Kaines (quoted by Herbert Spencer), who, in his "Elements of Criticism," says that in order to give the utmost force to a period, a complete sentence rhetorically, it ought, if possible, to be closed with that word which makes the greatest figure; that is, the one word of greatest importance. The keystone is the last piece to be placed in position, and it closes and completes the arch. It is, however, seldom practicable to close the period, that is, the complete sentence from one full stop to another, with the strongest word of all. Nevertheless, the right word *is* the keystone of the sentence, and for that reason it is of the greatest importance that the right one should be taken.

By way of very simple illustration, let us consider the two words *shall* and *will*. They seem to be almost insignificant, and yet upon the choice of the right one depends the strength of the whole sentence. I am sorry

to say that in nearly one half of the business letters I have read during the past three years the *wrong* word was chosen; consequently the strength of the written arch was impaired or destroyed.

The force and meaning of these two words vary according to the grammatical person of the nominative of the sentence. When *shall* is connected with a subject in the first person singular or plural, *I* or *we*, it expresses simply intention. *I shall go to New York tomorrow* is just the same as the equally unemphatic declaration, *I am going to New York tomorrow*. But *will* with the first person nominative, either singular or plural, is emphatic or forceful, and often it indicates determination in the face of strong opposition. *We will go to New York tomorrow* is equal to something like "there is strong opposition to our doing so, yet in spite of that we *are* going."

Will and *shall* with the second or third person usually have precisely the opposite sense from that which they have when employed with the first person. *Will* merely asserts intention; *shall* is practically the same as a command. There is an exception in civil or military intercourse, where the

mandatory *shall* is modulated by the form, *You will proceed to New Orleans and report to the senior officer in command.* At other times *You shall go*, or *He shall go*, implies that the speaker or writer has the right to give the command and the moral or physical power to enforce obedience.

Do not these simple examples show the importance of taking the correct word for the keystone of the sentence?

4. The Right Keyword and then the Others

As a letter is only a combination of sentences, it will be sufficient if we consider here one sentence and its general composition. The verb is considered, by those who have given special attention to grammar and rhetoric, *the* word which gives life, motion, action to the whole sentence. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that this word should be chosen with care, so as to convey the meaning exactly, and then properly expressed as to time, or tense.

We who use the English language are very much opposed to speaking or writing our verbs in their simple form. If a page of a book is carefully examined, it will be found that nearly all the verb phrases are

compounded of a principal verb, its present or past participle, and an auxiliary. I assume that all know what this statement means; but I illustrate by asking how often we simply *go* or *come* or *ride* or *walk*, or almost anything else? Do we not habitually say or write *I am going to Chicago next week?* The past tense is about the only one in which the simple form of the verb is frequently used.

Since the auxiliary is such an important part of the verb clause, it is necessary to give attention to getting the right form of it. Such expressions as *has came*, or *would have went*, or *have saw*, must be strictly avoided. There is always the danger that careless or uneducated writers will make mistakes in using some part of *to have*; but there is greater tendency to error when certain parts of *to be* are used in compound verb phrases. The past tenses of *shall* and *will* are governed by the same rules as those which apply to these words when employed to indicate future action. *Should* is used with the first person, *I* or *we*; *would* with the second and third persons, *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *they*. It is, therefore, not correct to say, *We would be glad to supply you with lum-*

ber at current prices. It ought to be *We shall*, etc.

The subjunctive is said to be falling into disuse, and I am inclined to think this is true. This mood indicates that which is future and uncertain, so that sometimes the expression *would I had known*, or others like it, seems to be proper; yet this uncertainty may be better expressed by *if I had known*. There are some writers who contend that *Would you be so kind as to lend me your knife*, or *Will you do me the favor to read this note*, is more polite than the simple, direct form, *Please*, etc. This is not true. To the first of those sentences the proper answer is: *Yes, I would if I were asked*, and to the second: *Yes, I will when I am asked*.

I hesitate to utter a word of caution here as to grammatical agreement between nominative and verb, as well as about the objective clause; yet it is to be regretted that in correspondence of almost every kind improvement in these matters is much to be desired. Such expressions as *Him and I was there*, and *He gave him and I some apples* are more frequently heard than seen, but they are too common in correspondence.

The advice to use short sentences is well

given; yet there is sometimes danger of making the expression over-curt when the admonition "brevity is the soul of wit" is too literally followed. Occasionally the sentence must be a long one; still, when it is possible to do so, let such sentences be avoided.

Again, it is frequently recommended to use short words rather than long ones; but very often the longer of two synonyms is more effective in every way. *It is magnificent* seems to be more forcible than *It is grand*, if that which we are describing justifies: other examples will probably occur to all. In business correspondence it may safely be taken as a rule, that of two words which convey the writer's meaning with equal, or nearly equal force, the shorter is to be preferred.

In correspondence we may say that we exactly reverse the process followed by the mason in building an arch. He places the keystone in its proper position the last of all; we—that is, the letter writers—should first choose our keyword carefully and then build our sentence around it, taking great pains to have all the other words conform to it.

CHAPTER II

THE ELASTIC ENGLISH LANGUAGE

1. The Word adapted to a Special Use

IT can hardly be necessary to draw attention to the wonderful development of the English language that has taken place within the last half-century, and which, so far as we Americans are specially to be considered, has been phenomenal during the last fifteen years. If a comparison is made between the first dictionary of the English language, that prepared by Cockeram, in London, England, in 1623, a modest octavo, or the first edition of our Noah Webster, New York, 1828, two volumes in quarto size, and "A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles founded mainly on the material collected by The Philological Society, edited by James A. H. Murray," in royal octavo, or "The Century Dictionary and Cyclopaedia," or the latest edition of Webster or Worcester, or any of our unabridged dic-

tionaries, the truth as to this expansion will be very clear.

The first volume of the Philological Society's work was issued in 1888; it is a thick volume of royal octavo size: in 1910 the eighth volume was issued: this includes words beginning with *Sch*. Already sufficient new material from *A* to *Sch* has been accumulated to make an extra volume or two. Of course *all* the words in that enormous dictionary are not pure or even derived English; but they may all be used by writers of English, and they indicate that "the elastic English language" is no mere figure of speech. The growth of our vocabulary is one of the surest signs of the life and strength of the English language.

In the great dictionaries that have been mentioned there are words taken from almost every known tongue on the globe. These have been found to express an idea so precisely and so concisely that they have come to be incorporated into English; because to give exactly the same sense with English words would require the use of a phrase, at least, and very often of a long sentence. It is in this and other similar

ways that borrowed words, as well as so many original ones, have come to be adapted to a special use.

In certain cases this specializing is properly described as "technical." The particular word is used by particular persons in a way that is scarcely intelligible to those who are not familiar with the craft, industry, or occupation by whose members the word has been appropriated. It is not necessary to give examples of these technical words and phrases: it is sufficient to warn letter writers against employing such specialized words in correspondence with those who are not familiar with the technicalities of their particular branch of business.

The use of words that are adapted to a special purpose will often accomplish an economy of mental effort on the part of the receiver of a letter, and that is probably the principal reason for their existence; but their use merely to display one's own technical knowledge is an affectation which should be carefully avoided. Within the often narrow circle of those who are familiar with these technicalities, this specializing — when skilfully employed — results

in the most admirable form of conciseness and clearness.

In general or social correspondence, as well as in matter which is intended for publication, it is advisable to avoid these technical or specialized words, because the ordinary reader does not like to be compelled to turn to his dictionary too frequently. One of the most effective and just criticisms that have been made upon the stories and poems of Rudyard Kipling is that the frequent use of words and phrases which are doubtless entirely familiar to the English people in India makes it difficult for readers in other parts of the world to understand some of his most effective points without a glossary, — that is, a sort of dictionary which explains in simple language the meaning and use of words or phrases that are not familiar to the ordinary reader. The specializing as to the meaning or use of words should always be made subordinate to entire clearness.

**2. The Word of Today is sometimes not
that of our Grandfathers**

This statement is true in a double sense: sometimes the correspondence of a hundred

years ago would be difficult of comprehension by many people of, at least, average education now; and certainly much of our specialized correspondence today, as well as a great deal of what appears in newspapers, magazines, and books nowadays, would be altogether unintelligible to our grandfathers.

This fact furnishes one of the strongest evidences of the growth of the English language. It is especially true in the field of business correspondence. A hundred years ago the young merchant who intended to make an effort to extend the range of his business beyond the narrow circle of his own country would have been compelled to use some other language than English.

Probably French was spoken more generally by statesmen, diplomats, commercial men, and travelers than any other language of Europe. It is still extremely popular in court and diplomatic circles, but it is rapidly being replaced by English in the great fields of commerce and industry. It is no longer an almost absolute necessity for the traveler who contemplates going off the "beaten track" to have some command of French in order to get along comfortably, and to be able to dispense with the services of

guides and interpreters when engaging in conversation with government officials, merchants, and tradesmen.

Speaking from a fairly extended personal experience, I do not hesitate to say that English is now *the world's* language, and a knowledge of it is sufficient to carry the commercial traveler or tourist round the globe. I do not mean to say that *everywhere* the wanderer will find somebody to speak English with him, for there are plenty of places—even along the well-trodden “beaten paths”—where English is entirely useless; but when French or German is not the language of the inhabitants, English will be found as useful, nine times out of ten, as is either of the other two tongues.

When comparing the words in constant use today with those entirely familiar to our grandfathers, and trying to put aside all personal and patriotic prejudice, I feel sure *our* vocabulary is more satisfactory: it is certainly much more extended. But these very facts constitute in themselves a source of danger for some letter writers; and this is one of the times when strength or safety is not always or even probably to be found in numbers. The very increase

in vocabulary—that is, the number of words at our service—and the variation from the strict usage of our grandfathers' time make it all the more difficult for the young, untrained hand at letter writing to select the one word that is proper and will precisely express the exact shade of meaning he wishes to convey.

The next section discusses this trouble which comes from an increase in the number of words at our service and the variation in their use; or what the French call *embarras des richesses*, that is, an embarrassment of wealth, or altogether too much of a good thing.

3. The Use of Synonyms

The principal uses of synonyms are, first, to avoid repetition of the same word, which sometimes produces a disagreeable and tiring effect upon the hearer or reader; second, to give to the spoken phrase or the written sentence a pleasing variation in what is called "coloring." If the sky were always blue, I fear we should tire of the sameness, to say nothing of the physical disasters that would result from perpetually cloudless heavens. Or if the whole surface of the

earth were green, green, forever green, from city suburb to town and village, and on again to the next city, that too would be deadly tedious. It is the variation in coloring that really makes pictorial art possible; for the shading in a picture that is simply black and white, or monochrome (a single color), suggests the colors of nature. Variation in words accomplishes a similarly pleasing effect in composition; hence it too may be called "coloring."

But it must be borne in mind that sometimes the actual repetition of the same word lends a force to what is said or written, which would be greatly diminished, if not entirely lost, were the word varied according to its permitted synonyms. This effective repetition is of two kinds: *EPIZEUXIS*, where the word is immediately repeated without any intervening word or clause, as: *The introducers of the now-established principles of political economy may fairly be considered to have made a great discovery; a discovery the more creditable, etc.*; and *EPANALEPSIS*, where a word or a clause intervenes, as: *The persecutions undergone by the Apostles furnished both a trial of their faith and a confirmation to ours: a*

trial to them, etc. Another form of the latter is EPANADOS, a repetition in inverse order, as: *O more exceeding love, or law more just? Just law, indeed, but more exceeding love!* POLYSYNDETON also belongs in this class. It consists in the frequent repetition of the conjunction, as: *We have ships and men and money and stores and public sentiment to support us, and that last is the best of all.* But polysyndeton must not be confused with the senseless reiteration of *and* when a child or a careless speaker or writer commits this fault.

The definition of *synonyms* has already been given; and we have now to consider merely how they may be used most effectively. I have no intention of giving a long discussion as to how different words having the same, or nearly the same, meaning may be used, but, as a sort of continuation of the last section, it is interesting to note how completely some words have changed as to their significance or use within a comparatively short time. *To guess* has come to be restored, both in the United States and in Canada, to the use which was not at all uncommon in England three or four hundred years ago; that is, as a synonym for *to*

think. Our British friends, ignoring the historical fact, declare that this usage is "an Americanism," and even Noah Webster seems to have been inclined to discourage the continued use of the word in this way; for he states: "guess . . . think; suppose — with an objective clause, and properly implying some uncertainty."

It is fairly certain that *autumn* was the name generally used for the third season of the year — from the "Autumnal Equinox" to the "Winter Solstice"; and that *fall* is another revival of an old English usage. . Webster seems to show a preference for the Norman-French word, for with *Fall*, scantily treated, he remarks "See Autumn." *Mistress* is another word that has emphatically changed as to its usage. In our grandfathers' time it was always an honorable title, one even which conveyed the idea of some distinction. Now it is carefully avoided by most people, lest it may be assumed to mean *paramour* or *concubine*. I am glad to see that there is a disposition, amongst those who are admitted to be our best guides in the matter of correct usage in English, to restore this word to its proper place — that is, to denote a woman having

some power, authority, or ownership. If the effort is successful, *mistress* will, however, be reserved for unmarried women who have reached the age of discretion. The curious *Mrs.* (*Missis*), which is really an abbreviation of *Mistress*, is to be retained for the head of a family, or any married woman.

Another word which has changed in meaning and usage within much less than a century is *wench*. It truly means a "girl" or "maiden," a "damsel," and it ought not to convey any bad meaning at all. Our grandfathers, however, used it for "a female servant," especially "a slave." The word must now be discarded altogether, unless a deliberate insult is intended; and yet, in some of our Southern States, the statutes have not been changed, and when a young negress is to be designated, it is by the word *wench*.

The very fact that the English language has been wonderfully expanded by adopting words from all tongues makes it exceptionally rich in synonyms. The use of these must be governed by judgment and good taste. It is but right and courteous that the standards of English composition and speech

which exist in England itself and throughout the British Empire should be recognized by us Americans when we are away from home, or when our correspondence is going abroad. Nearly all of those forms which the hypercritical Britons sneer at as being "Americanisms" (of course I do not refer to *slang*) are survivals of English that long ago received the stamp of approval from the best authors and speakers; and the sneer of today is often an indication of ignorance, instead of being a mark of superiority. Yet when abroad, or when sending letters to our British cousins, it is well not to be too insistent upon the use of words and phrases which are approved at home and which also may be shown to be correct, but which may offend the sensitive ears of our friends.

4. The Use of the Dictionary, etc.

It is well always to have such aids at hand and to make constant use of them. This advice is offered especially to stenographers, typists, juniors who have charge of correspondence, and young business men who may not have been so fortunate as to receive a thorough high-school education or its equivalent. Whenever there is the slight-

est doubt as to spelling, assume that you are wrong and refer to the dictionary; if you are doubtful about grammar, have some authority in grammar, syntax, and rhetoric handy; if you are uncertain as to the propriety of using a certain synonym, turn to a dictionary or some specialized book of reference. The confirmation of an admitted authority is always comforting; the correction of such is beneficial: while the gain in an increased vocabulary is of inestimable advantage.

Each writer will have to decide for himself which one of several recognized authorities he will take as guide. There is no Supreme Court or Hague Tribunal to decide beyond further appeal which system of spelling is to be the absolute standard. No sane person would be so rash as to say that any one writer is competent to utter the final word as to phraseology, style, etc.

It appears unwise to try to create an American written language which shall differ widely from the parent English in spelling, phraseology, rhetoric, and other respects. Yet so long ago as 1828, when Noah Webster issued the first edition of his unabridged dictionary (two volumes, containing 12,000

words), he expressed the hope that the time might come, and speedily, when in this country there should be just such an independent language or dialect of English. If such a separation be accomplished, and then carried out consistently and logically, the time must come eventually when the great treasury of English literature will be a closed cell to American youth, who will then have to study English — English as they must now learn German and the Scandinavian languages — if they wish to study the beginnings of our noble English literature. I cannot refrain from mentioning here that the great lexicographer Noah Webster, the dictionary-maker, himself commits the blunder of using the phrase *under the circumstances*. It is amusing to note that this phrase is *not* given the endorsement of imitation in the recent and latest editions of "Webster's Unabridged Dictionary," wherein the preposition is always *in*.

The letter writer himself is not so likely to make constant use of books of reference, and yet some of the most successful and thoroughly practical business men are constant students of dictionary, thesaurus, books of synonyms, and other guides, in order that

they may improve the *style* of their business correspondence. It may be that busy commercial men generally give no personal attention to such matters; and yet I can but think that if two letters, dealing with the same subject or making identical offers, are received by one man, the one concisely, correctly, and gracefully expressed, but with no suggestion of affected or superior knowledge, the other faulty in spelling, grammar, and construction, rambling and incoherent in style, the receiver will probably give first attention to the former, unless there is strong personal or economic reason for giving the second preference.

I am not disposed to recommend any particular dictionary; for I think there will come before long a rebellion against the present inconsistent rules and recommendations of the Reformed Spelling Society, and there will result a return to the beauty of the English language, with certain desirable changes which shall be agreed upon by English writers and speakers of the whole world. Still, I think that for desk use such handy books as Charles John Smith's "Synonyms discriminated," and Louis A. Fleming's "Synonyms, Autonyms, and Associated

Words," will be sufficient for most purposes. Those whose correspondence takes them into wider fields than just the United States, and those who contemplate writing for publication, contributions to magazines or newspapers or books, will discover, each for himself, what is truly helpful in the particular case.

But, above all things, consistency is to be commended. Whatever standard for spelling, locution, or rhetoric is decided upon after mature deliberation and, perhaps, on the advice of competent friends, be loyal to that authority at all times; except, it may be, when engaged in correspondence with foreigners, when localisms should not be too assertive. I know English firms who have refused to engage in correspondence with Americans because their sense of propriety was shocked by what they chose to call (incorrectly, to be sure) "offensive Americanisms." If business promises to be worth seeking, concession may sometimes be made advantageously.

CHAPTER III

STYLE

I. Definition

A VERY simple definition of this word *style* would be to say: it is the way in which a note, letter, essay, book, or anything else in literature is written; or any conversation, address, speech, extempore sermon, or whatever it may be, is spoken. The Century Dictionary's definition is: "Mode of expression in writing or speaking; characteristic diction; a particular method of expressing thought by selection or collocation of words, distinct in some respect from other methods, as determined by nationality, period, literary form, individuality, etc.; in an absolute sense, appropriate or suitable diction; conformity to an approved literary standard: as, the *style* of Shakespere or of Dickens; antiquated or modern *style*; didactic, poetic, or forensic *style*; a pedantic *style*; a nervous *style*; a cynical *style*." If the reader un-

derstands clearly the meaning and use of all those words, the definition is fairly satisfactory; yet it is open to the charge of being pedantic and too technical. Most people who find it necessary to consult the dictionary frequently are not scholars, in the sense of the word that means *educated* rather above the average. Therefore the definition quoted is itself bad style, because it is beyond the understanding of, probably, a majority of people, and of particularly the classes for whom this handbook is specially prepared.

Although Herbert Spencer, in his "Philosophy of Style," does not give a precise definition of the word, yet he suggests what he seems to think it is when he says, "the importance of economizing the reader's or hearer's attention." That is to say, we should try to speak and to write so that the listener or the reader will understand us clearly and at once; without — in the case of spoken words — making it necessary for him to ask us to repeat; or — in writing — compelling the reader to go back and read over again so much as a single phrase, sentence, or paragraph before he catches our meaning precisely.

2. Contrast

This is a feature which has little reason for being conspicuous, or even existent, in ordinary business or friendly letters. In business correspondence it may almost be said to be out of place. It is defined in dictionaries as a comparison of two things, abstract or concrete, by showing as clearly as possible how entirely unlike they are; the placing side by side of things which are entirely opposite to each other in every important characteristic, in order to make the antagonism of their qualities all the more apparent. As an extreme example of contrast, I might say that if there were no such thing as *evil* in the world, we should be unable to understand and appreciate *virtue*: therefore we ought to be glad that there is evil! Or I might say it is the darkness of night alone which enables us to understand the brightness of day. Of course this characteristic is most conspicuously brought out in pictorial art, when one bright color makes the adjoining somber one appear all the more gloomy; or, on the other hand, we may say that it is the sober, dingy color that enables us to *see* the beauty of that

which we call the brilliant one. It must be noted most carefully that contrast demands that the two things to be considered, either in art or literature, must be in juxtaposition, that is, literally side by side.

In ordinary letters there is seldom occasion to give a vivid description of something, and then suddenly to change the style to something that is the very opposite or in sharp contrast. As we proceed in the scale of actual letters, it is evident that this feature, contrast, may be given greater importance as the correspondence becomes discursive, descriptive, or narrative. It probably reaches its climax, or absolute height of importance, in love letters, wherein the swain draws a sharp contrast between his own unworthiness and the brilliant charms of the lady to whom he is writing.

At the same time it is by no means impossible that a very precise business man may wish to express his satisfaction or his displeasure by using the figure of speech, contrast. When such occasion arises, great care should be taken to be consistent even in bringing together things that are very different. To say that a quantity of flour has been received in such bad condition that

the stuff is like sacks of dirty chalk, might be permitted; but to contrast flour with something that causes a violent or impossible strain upon the imagination — a liquid, for instance, or something inflammable — should be avoided.

3. The Right Style

Beginning with the terse, brief, and direct business letter, in which the writer, having something concrete to say, does it with just as few words as possible, and going on to the most flowery expression of which our language is capable, there is a right style for every gradation in ceremony and matter. The business man, who, when at his desk, properly considers every superfluous word as almost a crime, may nevertheless, in his leisure or recreation, derive the utmost pleasure and satisfaction from an essay or poem that is simply extravagant in the use of words and overflowing with beautiful figures of speech.

I take, as examples of good general style in English composition, one of Benjamin Franklin's letters and Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." The first is one of the shortest I could find in the Alfred Henry

Smith collection. I know it is not so satisfactory for my purpose as some of the others; but for one of those I have not sufficient space: the one I have chosen is in reply to an address of the Assembly of Pennsylvania, congratulating him upon his safe return from Europe.

MR. SPEAKER AND GENTLEMEN,

I am extreamly happy to find by your friendly and affectionate Address, that my Endeavours to serve our Country in the late important struggle have met with the Approbation of so respectable a Body as the Representatives of the Freemen of Pennsylvania. I esteem that Approbation as one of the greatest Honours of my life. I hope the Peace with which God has been graciously pleased to bless us may be lasting, and that the free Constitution we now enjoy may long contribute to promote our common Felicity. The kind Wishes of the General Assembly for my particular Happiness affect me very sensibly, and I beg they would accept my thankful acknowledgments.

As an example of the direct epistolary style and of simple English, nothing could be better.

The famous "Gettysburg Address" is of a somewhat different type of English. It is not so purely Anglo-Saxon, yet its directness and force make it a model.

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war; testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great

task remaining before us, — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that the dead shall not have died in vain — that the nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

4. The Wrong Style

From a most unfortunate wealth of material, I have chosen something from Miss Marie Corelli's "Barabbas."

Then, glancing from the Accused to the accusers, from the priests to the people, from the people in turn to Barabbas, who waited before him sullenly expectant, he sighed impatiently, and with the desperately resolved air of one compelled to perform the very act his soul most abhorred, he beckoned to a clerk in attendance and gave him a whispered order. The man retired, but returned almost immediately bearing a large silver bowl filled with pure water. Flinging back his rich robe of office and allowing it to trail in voluminous folds behind him,

Pilate, closely followed by the attendant carrying the silver vessel, stepped forward again to confront the populace, who were becoming more contentious and noisy with every moment's delay. On perceiving the governor's advance, however, they ceased their turbulent murmurings and angry disputations, and concentrated all their attention upon him, the more particularly as his movements were somewhat strange and unexpected. Rolling up his gold-embroidered sleeves well above his wrists, he raised his bare hands aloft and showed them, palms outward to the multitude, the great jewels on his fingers flashing like stars in the morning sun. He held them so uplifted for a minute's space, while the people, wondering, looked on in silence, — then, slowly lowering them, he dipped them deep in the shining bowl, rinsing them over and over again in the clear cold element which sparkled in its polished receptacle like an opal against fire. And as he shook the bright drops away from him, he cried in a loud, penetrating voice — "I am innocent of the blood of this just person! See ye to it!"

The style is bad in many ways: it is inflated and inappropriate; the figure of the

jewels flashing like stars in the morning sun is inaccurate because the stars do not appear when the sun is shining.

In the King James version of the Bible the same scene is thus described:

So when Pilate saw that he prevailed nothing, but rather that a tumult was arising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it!"

The revised version makes no great change in words, only "this righteous man" for "this just person," but can there be any hesitation in condemning the style of that quotation from the novel? Whatever the purpose of writing may be, its character is determined for us by rules; they may be written or unwritten, and one of the most rigid of those rules is "brevity is the soul of wit." Miss Corelli's violation of the rules of style may be taken as a warning by school boy, business man, author, and every other person who has occasion to write English.

CHAPTER IV

FINISH

1. Expression

FINISH is a word that is just as applicable to a piece of writing as it is to a piece of furniture, or anything else. The *finish* of my dining-table tells every one who looks at the useful piece of furniture whether or not the workman through whose hands the table passed just before it came into my house was competent. But it requires a sharp examination to determine that workman's honesty in giving proper attention to the construction, the parts of the table that are not conspicuous. Any piece of English composition that has a smooth, pleasing sound as we read it, and is properly arranged according to the rules of rhetoric, etc., may be at once called *finished*; or it may be subjected to some severe tests which bring out defects in mechanical arrangement, comparison, contrast, style, etc.; it is, therefore, not truly a finished piece of work.

EXPRESSION is defined as the art of expressing, or embodying, or representing in spoken words, composition, or action; it is utterance, or declaration, or representation, or manifestation. The long and awkward words must be used here to avoid the lengthy phrases which would otherwise be necessary. In ordinary speech, an illustration of *expression* is found in the phrase, *an expression of the public will*. In rhetoric, however, the word means the peculiar manner of utterance in speech, or description in writing, which is called forth by the subject and the sentiment aroused in the speaker or author. It is defined, very simply, as elocution or diction, that is, the choice of words in any utterance or composition. It is something that must be considered most carefully by all letter writers, with a view to making the particular way chosen for expression appropriate to the subject-matter of the correspondence. Without this careful watch upon his pen, there is danger that the young and inexperienced letter writer may commit a blunder which will make him appear ridiculous. To discuss the iron market in the language of the baseball field, or to describe a boatrace in prayer-meeting terms, is to

commit a violation of *expression*, as well as of *style, taste, judgment*, and every other rule of correspondence.

2. Finish as applied to Business Correspondence

In no department of letter writing is the caution of *brevity* so appropriate and so filled with meaning as it is when the business man is at his desk prepared to take up a great mass of correspondence. The very pressure which such accumulation means, when added to the thousand and one other details of his daily life, may lead to a lack of *finish* if the letter writer does not watch himself carefully, or if his stenographer and typist is not exceptionally competent in the matter of details.

We are told that "verbosity," the use of too many or needless words, is always to be condemned; and that an "involved style," one which is not clear but requires careful study with re-readings in order to get an understanding of what is meant, is unpardonable. Yet in some of the very guides to correspondence and text-books on composition and rhetoric wherein these declarations are made, numerous words may be properly

struck out, and not infrequently a sentence may be rearranged so as to accomplish "economy of attention on the part of the reader."

In one of just such books I read "that parentheses should be avoided, and that Saxon words should be used in preference to those of Latin origin, are established precepts." That sentence itself breaks the rules it is intended to make; and on the very page where it appears, in just six lines there are ten words which come from the Latin language, either direct or through Italian or French, for which equally good and pure English substitutes might have been used. Besides, parenthetical phrases are by no means wanting on that same page.

In business correspondence, style, expression, taste, force, and all else that helps to make a letter effective, are as important and as specialized as they are in any other department of our subject. So far as the parenthesis is concerned, its use sometimes puts away the necessity for another and long sentence: it may very properly be set off by enclosing brackets rather than commas. As for Anglo-Saxon words, there should be no hesitation in giving them preference; yet

very often we avoid disagreeable repetition by using a synonym that is derived from the Latin or Greek language. All unabridged dictionaries give information as to the source of a *derived* word. The reader who wishes to make a careful study of this subject, so that his correspondence may perhaps be a model of pure, strong, graceful English, is recommended to procure a copy of "An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language." It was compiled by the Rev. Walter W. Skeat, who was, until his death only a few months ago, Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge, England. He was probably the most eminent and competent authority on "English undefiled."

I have given so much space to what is, I know, a digression, because the importance of Anglo-Saxon is something which ought to interest the business man almost as much as it does the philologist. Such importance is indicated by the fact that the first edition of Skeat's dictionary was prepared in 1879-81 and the fourth was issued in 1910. The last is much larger than the first, showing that the interest in the subject is a permanent one.

If we accept Herbert Spencer's description of language "as an apparatus of symbols for the conveyance of thought," we may also say that, as in a mechanical apparatus, the more simple and the better arranged its parts, the greater will be the effect produced.

3. Finish as related to Public Correspondence

This opens up a subject that tempts me to be discursive, that is, to wander away from the main thought. It is somewhat difficult to keep from letting this section become historical rather than strictly practical. We may easily go back to the baked tiles of Southwestern Asia, or the most ancient writings of China, or the correspondence of antiquity wherever it has been found, and always there are interesting opportunities for studying the variation and development of *finish*. Of course in all these cases taken from ancient times most of us are dependent upon translations, and therefore the benefit to be derived is not of the same kind, and it certainly is not of the same value, as is that which we get from English writings. For the immediate purpose of this handbook we must resist all temptation to study the

writings of antiquity, as well as those which have to be borrowed from some other language than our own.

So important is the commencement of a law, proclamation, diplomatic despatch, or composition which is intended for publication, that very frequently the writer leaves his introduction to the last. It is unquestionably true that in documents of such importance it is not precisely the author who determines for himself and altogether independently just what he will write and how he will express himself. It is often the matter itself which gives shape to the author's thought. As he proceeds with his writing, he often finds that the words and even the paragraphs take upon themselves a form that he would not have admitted possible before he actually undertook his task. If this is dangerous (and for myself, I think it is not), the danger is much greater for those who dictate to a stenographer or typist than it is for the person who uses his pen and writes out his thoughts in long hand.

Some of the best examples of *finish* in public correspondence were completed, if I may so express myself, before the opening sentence or paragraph had been put into

actual words. In this way some of the most effective laws in our statute books were finished before the "enacting clause" had been prepared. But whatever method may be followed, it is well for the author to read his communication aloud to himself when he has (as he thinks) completed it, and before he permits it to leave his hands. Doing this will often bring out defects or weaknesses which did not assert themselves as the pen passed over the paper and gave a fixed character to what was in his mind in a somewhat undetermined form. By this plan it will be surprisingly easy to detect superfluous words and temptations to depart from the rules for *form*, *style*, etc., which do not always appeal to the eye as one reads to himself. Indeed, I do not hesitate to say that no author can criticize his own work *at all* unless he reads it aloud: eye-reading in this case is absolutely unreliable.

The best way of all to determine as to *finish* is to submit the written communication to some friend who will be kindly and yet thoroughly critical. I am speaking now, it must be borne in mind, of public correspondence in a very general way; wherein words express rather more than they precisely

denote. This is the only opportunity I shall have to mention the essay, the story, or the book, and it is of these I am thinking when I advise all young writers to try to get the opinion of a friend.

The writer himself has been so long alone with his subject that it has grown so close to him as to make it impossible for him to stand away from it and see it in proper perspective. For that reason, if for no other, it is well to get the opinion of some one who *can* look at it from the outside, before submitting it to the final and fateful tests — the publisher and the public. This same advice is not entirely out of place when applied to specially important business letters, particularly when their contents are such as to make it even remotely possible that litigation may result.

But this critic friend must be somewhat more than a mere kindly acquaintance; he must be competent and also willing to incur the danger of displeasing, should his opinion be unfavorable to the author. As William Hunt said: "Don't mind what your friends say of your work! In the first place, they all think you are an idiot: in the second place, they expect great things of you: and

in the third place, they wouldn't know it even if you did a good thing!" So the choice of a critic friend is really a serious matter, after all.

There are so many pleasing examples of admirable style and finish in the published letters and correspondence of eminent statesmen, as well as in state papers, that it is not necessary to mention names here. In the list of British publications of this kind, and in those of our own country's public men, there is a wealth of material which will well repay careful study. It will be noted that the best are always comparable with the standards of clearness, simplicity, force, and finish which our own George Washington established: they are adapted to the understanding of the least educated persons.

4. Finish as related to General and Social Correspondence

The word *finish*, when applied to this subdivision of letter writing, will often mean very little more than the happy choice of words and the felicitous manner of expressing what it is desired to say. It is, therefore, a combination of good taste, kindly

consideration for the feelings of the person to whom the note or letter is sent, and an indication of both culture and education. Care should be taken to avoid all affectation of superiority in position or culture. When properly considered and used, *finish* will make all necessary concession to superiors in social or official rank, and will indicate in a pleasing way the equality which is admitted. It will, in the case of necessity or advisability, mark with perfect clearness the just superiority of the writer, which must be recognized because society even in the United States is not democratic. In such circumstances the receiver, unless a person of dense ignorance or of offensive manner or of aggressive presumption, when replying will not dream of overstepping the bounds of propriety; to do this often leads to a pretended air of familiarity which is peculiarly offensive.

There is, probably, no one feature of letter writing which has developed greater changes than this *finish*. The contrast is very great indeed between what was considered proper a few generations ago and what is claimed to be correct by recognized authorities now. It is not meant to suggest

that the most finished letter writer, regardless of sex and social position, cannot administer a rebuke where such is deserved; but that good taste, which is always a characteristic of the person who properly understands and uses *finish* in social correspondence, acts to restrain from administering a rebuff, no matter what the provocation may be. To accomplish this disagreeable result in an indirect way is probably the only permissible and defensible excuse for ignoring altogether a letter or note. It is true that all who have undertaken to give advice or assistance in this matter of correspondence seem to be agreed in saying that every written communication is entitled to recognition in the form of a reply. If the writer of the first communication has been presumptuous or gratuitously rude, the epistle may be ignored as a merited rebuke. Yet, to be entirely consistent in his attitude towards society, the receiver of even such an unpleasant letter ought to reply. It is in framing the reply that *finish* will administer the stinging rebuke which is deserved. In looking over printed volumes of social correspondence which was carried on a century ago, the most amusing evidence of the dif-

ferent ways of estimating *finish* then and now will be found in the stilted and pedantic phrases employed by our ancestors to begin a letter. The same characteristic is noticeable in the closing of social correspondence. When contrasted with what we now consider the ease, grace, and *finish* of the cultivated and experienced letter writer, it almost seems that the language employed by the two groups had itself been radically changed.

5. Conclusion: Admonitory

It has been the principal purpose of this book to impress upon the person who has occasion to write letters the importance of deciding just what is to be said before beginning to write, and then saying just that with as few words as possible. Attention has been given to the fact that the phrase "as few words as possible" may have several different meanings, according to the varying nature of the communication.

It is surprising how very few teachers are to be found who are competent to give instruction in the art of letter writing. Inasmuch as this is the case, it seems to follow that every writer must be his own

teacher to a very considerable extent. This necessity is recognized frankly in this book; and instead of trying to prepare a text-book, the writer has been satisfied to point out some of the reefs and snags in the stream of letters, and snares and pitfalls in the pathway of the inexperienced letter writer. It is hoped that these suggestions and warnings will be beneficial in the training and practise which each must provide for himself, since he cannot count upon getting them from others in just the way they must assume, to have practical benefit in each individual case.

Strange as it must seem to most readers, there is much more literature of an educational and suggestive nature at the service of the person whose literary ambition has a higher purpose and aim than the very important one of letter writing than the business correspondent has at his command. Possibly I am in error when I intimate even that any character of writing *can* be loftier in results than the letter. It would be easy to prepare a fairly extensive list of books which deal with the Art of Literary Composition, the Art and Craft of the Author, the Way to Write English — that is, composition for

essays, short stories, and books — and a score of similar subjects; while the sensible guides to correct form in letter writing are not enough to hang one on each finger of a single hand.

By scores and double scores of authors, teachers of composition, and other successful literary craftsmen, it is impressed upon the would-be writer that he must have a clear idea of what he intends to say before he sits down to write. Mr. C. E. Heisch* says that when the writer has made up his mind what he wishes to say, "he may sit down doggedly, and set himself to express in writing the thoughts that are in his mind." In every way this may be applied to the letter writer.

In the ordinary course of correspondence by letter the writer is relieved from one source of embarrassment which often troubles the "author," in the narrow and strictly literary sense of the word. It does not often happen that the letter writer has to seek a subject, for the correspondence will probably have developed to that stage when it brings subjects in plenty. Yet in

* "The Art and Craft of the Author."

beginning a correspondence it is most essential that the letter writer think deeply and clearly before he commences to write. If his correspondent is at all shrewd, and if there is evidence of weakness in the way and measure of thought, it will be readily detected, and the effect may be disastrous.

It is hoped that sufficient suggestions have been given as to the rhetorical features of correspondence — Style, Form, Force, Finish, and the like — as well as in matters relating to mechanical construction, etc. In this closing section of the book it seems to be quite appropriate to say something of the way to close the text of the letter. If it is sometimes difficult to begin a letter, just as it is to start a more pretentious piece of literary work, it is probably more troublesome to close one properly. A graceful or striking ending is not essential to a business letter; on the contrary, such a thing is distinctly out of place: an abrupt stop is preferable to a long-drawn-out climax. But whatever the communication may be — business letter, formal official despatch, precise social letter, or friendly, chatty note — it is desirable for the writer to stop the moment he has said all there is to say. Business

letters often come quietly and naturally to an end, without abruptness; this is noticeably the case in the correspondence of the man whose experience has been long and extended in range. Yet abruptness, which fairly makes the reader catch his breath, is better than the wandering on and on, simply because the writer has not wit or wisdom sufficient to form the concluding sentence.

In this little volume, as it has been written, admonitions and suggestions have been given as they occurred to the writer. They may not always have been precisely apposite, yet it is believed that they will be helpful. Now, in order that he may not be fairly accused of inability to find a proper concluding sentence, the author tries to practise what he has preached.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

SPECIMEN FORMS AND SUGGESTIONS

A communication to the President of the United States:

There should be ample space left at the top and the bottom. There should be a wide margin at the left and a fair one at right. The communication should be written on legal-cap size paper, unruled, and may be either written with the pen or typed, at the writer's pleasure. It must be folded, across the paper, twice; and will be, of course, enclosed in a proper-sized envelope. "Legal-cap" paper is heavy, usually 8½ by 13 inches.

9999 DE QUINCEY AVENUE, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
June 17, 1913

SIR:

I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your communication of June 10th, informing me of —

With assurances of profound respect,

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN ADAMS

To

THE PRESIDENT

EXECUTIVE MANSION

WASHINGTON

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

This same address is to be written on the envelope, and the writer's full name and address should be given in the upper, left-hand corner.

A communication to a Cabinet officer:

Spaces and margins should be similar to those in the case of a communication to The President. It is preferable in this case, also, to use legal-cap paper, unruled; although custom sanctions the use of the letter-size. The paper must be of good quality, and the letter is to be enclosed in an official-sized envelope.

9999 DE QUINCEY AVENUE, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

June 17, 1913

EXCELLENCY:

I have the honor to request that a Department of State passport for myself and family be sent to me.

I enclose the necessary information, duly verified by a proper official, as well as a Post Office money order for the customary fee.

I have the honor to be

Your Excellency's

Obedient Servant,

JOHN ADAMS

To

THE HONORABLE MARK ANTONY
SECRETARY OF STATE
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

A communication to a Diplomatic Representative of the United States at a foreign court:

The same conventions may properly be followed in this case as in the preceding.

It is customary to use the title of Honorable in addressing Ambassadors and full Ministers; but it should be remembered that in Great Britain, "Honourable" is a quasi-title of nobility, given to younger sons and daughters of peers. It is the common style of the younger sons of earls and the children of viscounts, barons, and legal life peers. A marquess is "Most Honourable"; earls, viscounts, barons, and privy councillors are "Right Honourable," and so are the lord mayor of London and the lord provost of Edinburgh during their actual terms of office. In the British colonies Honourable has come to be used pretty much in the same way that we employ it; for members of executive and legislative bodies and for judges during service.

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9999 DE QUINCEY AVENUE, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

June 17, 1913

EXCELLENCY:

I have the honor

I have the honor to be

Your Excellency's

Obedient Servant,

JOHN ADAMS

To

THE HONORABLE MARK ANTONY

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENI-
POTENTIARY

AMERICAN EMBASSY

LONDON

ENGLAND

OR

To

THE HONORABLE MARK ANTONY

ENVOY EXTRAORDINARY AND MINISTER PLENIPOTEN-
TIARY

AMERICAN LEGATION

COPENHAGEN

DENMARK

A communication to a Consul-General, a Consul, a Vice-Consul, or a Consular Agent, may be phrased in less formal terms, and may properly assume the form of an ordinary letter.

9999 DE QUINCEY AVENUE, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
June 17, 1913

MARK ANTONY, ESQUIRE
AMERICAN CONSUL-GENERAL
[*Post Office address, if practicable.*]
LIVERPOOL
ENGLAND

DEAR SIR:

I am desirous of procuring information as to . . .
and respectfully request your assistance.

Assuring you that I shall highly appreciate any
help you may be able to render, I am

Yours respectfully

JOHN ADAMS

A communication to a diplomatic representative of a foreign government at Washington should follow the same general form adopted for Cabinet Officers, Ambassadors, and Ministers. It is preferable to use legal-cap paper, but not imperative. The despatch may be impersonal, thus:

SIR:

.

To

THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR
GERMAN EMBASSY
WASHINGTON
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

It is better to ascertain the heraldic and academic titles of the ambassador, and to address him personally and formally:

HIS EXCELLENCY

COUNT A. B. C., *degrees, titles, etc*

HIS IMPERIAL GERMAN MAJESTY'S

AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY
etc

The General of the Army is addressed thus:

To

GENERAL JOHN D. SMITH

COMMANDING THE ARMIES OF THE UNITED STATES

The head of the Navy:

To

ADMIRAL JOHN D. SMITH

COMMANDING THE FLEETS OF THE UNITED STATES

But there is some difference of opinion. Precise people contend that the title should be "Major-General" or "Rear-Admiral."

A specimen or two of old-time love-letters serve to show that there has not been much change in this form of correspondence, and probably most people will say, "but little improvement."

William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, wrote the following to the Countess:

BURTON PYNSENT, April 25, 1772

My epistle of to-day will be short, and to me very sweet; for it is to tell you we propose starting out on Monday next. The boys are drunk with expectations of joy; I, not of the soberest. We celebrated yesterday a cheerful birthday. William complimented James on being so great an arithmetician, being now past decimals, and in un-decimals; so you see we pun too, in order to fit ourselves for the University. They both made a morning's visit to Mr. Speke, whose birthday, too, yesterday was. He showed James a charming mare, promised to him for next September: so you may judge if the day was happy. My kind old neighbour this moment arrives, and leaves time only to say my impatience to see you again and the dear children will not be conveyed by words; till which happy moment, a Dio vi raccomando.

Miss Jane Welsh wrote thus to Thomas Carlyle:

'HADDINGTON,' THE SANCTUM, Sunday Morning
8 May, 1825

BEST AND DEAREST, — *I believe I am going to lose the faculty of writing, as I have already lost the faculty of speech. For this half hour and more I have been trying to express to you some of the hundred things that are in my heart; and I can find no words, at least, none but such as seem cold and inadequate to what I feel. Well! no matter! You know already that I love you with all my soul; that I am sad, very sad at parting with you; and*

shall not be otherwise than sad till we meet again. And knowing this, you may easily imagine all that I would and cannot say. . . . I will walk too, every day, and do all things that you bade me. Yesterday I was at Paradise. Alas! Paradise no more: Ich bin allein. . . . God bless you, meine Seele.

Yours forever and ever.

JANE WELSH

Of the hundreds of volumes in English at our disposal, some from a German lover are translated to show how even an iron-handed warrior wrote love-letters. From the voluminous correspondence of this kind indicted by the great Bismarck, just two or three extracts are made:

(Not dated: written about the end of December, 1846.)

TO HERR VON PUTTKAMER:

MOST HONORED SIR:—*I begin this communication by indicating its content in the first sentence—it is a request for the highest thing you can dispose of in this world, the hand of your daughter. . . . [Had others belittled Bismarck's merits as he himself did, there would have been trouble!]*

I beg you to convey to your wife my respectful compliments, and to accept kindly the assurance of my love and esteem.

BISMARCK

"ANGELA MIA."

What a different view I take of everything—not merely that which concerns you as well and because it concerns you, or will concern you also

(although I have been bothering myself for two days with the question where your writing-desk shall stand), but my whole view of life is a new one, and I am cheerful and interested even in my work on the dike and police matters. This change, this new life, I owe, next to God, to you, *ma très chère, mon adorée. Jeanneton* — to you who do not heat me occasionally — like an alcohol flame, but work in my heart like warming fire.

Bismarck was a linguist, and therefore had a full vocabulary upon which he drew heavily for terms of endearment: "Only beloved Jeanette Fredericke Charlotte Eleonore Dorothea," "Johanna, My or Our Better Half," "My Angel," "Dearest and Belovedst," "Czarna kotko, mila duszo," "Jeanne la méchante." This last when the post was delayed!

DEAREST, ONLY BELOVED JUANITA, BETTER HALF OF MYSELF, — *I should like to begin my letter with every possible form of address through which I may win your favor, for I am in sore need of your forgiveness. I will not leave you to guess the reason why, lest you should imagine something worse than that I have been chosen to the Landtag and have accepted it.*

In awful contrast to the dignity and propriety of these old-timers, I have taken the following two from a "Manual of Social

and Business: a Guide to Correct Writing," published only twenty-one years ago.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

96 — ST., June 1, 18—

DEAR MISS HAWLEY:

You will, I trust, forgive this abrupt and plainly spoken letter. Although I have been in your company but once, I cannot forbear writing to you in defiance of all rules of etiquette. Affection is sometimes of slow growth, but sometimes it springs up in a moment. I left you last night with my heart no longer my own. I cannot, of course, hope that I have created any interest in you, but will you do me the great favor to allow me to cultivate your acquaintance. Hoping that you may regard me favorably, I shall await with much anxiety your reply, I remain,

Yours Devotedly

BENSON GOODCHILD

REPLY

604 — ST., June 1, 18—

MR. GOODCHILD:

DEAR SIR,—Undoubtedly I ought to call you severely to account for your declaration of love at first sight, but I really cannot find it in my heart to do so, as I must confess that, after our brief interview last evening, I have thought much more of you than I should have been willing to have acknowledged had you not come to the confession first. Seriously speaking, we know but little of each other yet, and we must be very careful not to exchange

our hearts in the dark. I shall be happy to receive you here, as a friend, with a view to our further acquaintance. I am,

Dear sir,

MARIAN HAWLEY

The impudence of one and the immodesty of the other are almost matched by the defective rhetoric of both. As warnings, they should serve a purpose; as examples of "Correct Writing," they cannot be too strongly condemned.

Does the world move so very fast, after all? Here are two examples of a formal and rather obsequious style of letter that can easily be matched by some composed and written recently; yet these selections were penned nearly three hundred years ago.

To

SIR H. WOTTON

October the 4th. 1622, almost at midnight

SIR,

All our moralities are but our out-works, our Christianity is our Citadel; a man who considers duty but the dignity of his being a man, is not easily beat from his outworks, but from his Christianity never; and therefore I dare trust you, who contemplates them both. . . . Here is room for an Amen; the prayer . . . so I am going to my bedside to make for all you and all yours, with

Your true friend and servant in Christ Jesus

J. DUNNE

SIR, —

I know not which of us wonne it by the hand, in the last charge of Letters. . . . Our blessed Saviour multiply his blessings upon that noble family where you are, and your self, and your sonne; as upon all them that are derived from

Your poor friend and servant

J. DUNNE

A specimen of a popular style at the time, but rather stilted:

OLNEY, ENGLAND, *June 16, 1769*

MY DEAR FRIEND:

I am obliged to you for your invitation, but being long accustomed to retirement, which I was always fond of, I am now more than ever unwilling to visit those noisy scenes which I never loved, and which I now more than ever abhor. I remember you with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as I ever entertained for any man.

I love you and yours.

I thank you for your constant remembrance of me, and I shall not cease to be their and your

Affectionate Friend

WILLIAM COWPER

To

JOSEPH HILL, *Esquire*
LONDON

Specimens of official correspondence:

WILLIAMSBURG, *Oct. 2, 1779*

SIR,

Just as the letter accompanying this was going off, Col. Matthews arrived on parole from New

York, by the way of head-quarters, bringing your Excellency's letters on his subject, with that of the British commissary of prisoners. . . . I must, therefore, ask the favour of your Excellency to forward the enclosed by flag, when the opportunity offers, as I suppose General Phillips will be in New York before it reaches you.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

With the greatest esteem,

Your most obedient, and most humble servant,

THOMAS JEFFERSON

To

HIS EXCELLENCY,

GENERAL WASHINGTON

RICHMOND, September 3, 1780

DEAR SIR,

I sincerely condole with you on our late misfortune [Battle of Camden, August 16, 1780], which sits the heavier on my mind as being produced by our own countrymen. Instead of considering the past, however, we are to look forward and prepare for the future. . . . We shall exert every nerve to assist you in every way in our power, being, as we are, without any money in the Treasury, or any prospect of more till the Assembly meets in October.

I am, with great esteem,

Your most obedient and most humble servant

THOMAS JEFFERSON

To

EDWARD STEVENS, Esquire

Some friendly letters — old and modern :

NEWBURGH, 15th August, 1782

MY DEAR MCHENRY,

Let me congratulate you, and I do it very sincerely, on your restoration to health. . . . Do not, my dear Doctor, tease your Mistress in this manner — much less your wife, when you get one. The first will pout — & the other may scold — a friend will bear with it, especially one who assures you, with as much truth as I do, that he is sincere.

Adieu.

GO. WASHINGTON

MONTICELLO, April 16, 1811

DEAR SIR, —

I felicitate you sincerely on your destination to Paris, because I believe it will contribute both to your happiness and the public good. Yet it is not unmixed with regret. What is to become of our past revolutionary history? Of the antidotes of truth to the misrepresentations of Marshall? This example proves the wisdom of the maxim, never put off to to-morrow what can be done to-day. But, putting aside vain regret, I shall be happy to hear from you in your new station. I cannot offer you in exchange the minutiae of the Cabinet, the workings of Congress, or underworkings of those around them.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

To

JOEL BARLOW, Esq.

CONCORD, 9 May, 1845

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I send you two or three little pieces, garnets for your "Diadem," — if not too late. But I think you gave me into May in your first communication on the subject, for the latest day. My wife & my mother have been a little uneasy at the long delay of my miniature effigy which your compatriot Mr. Griswold borrowed of the former, and insist that I shall inquire if it is safe, or has it some time been returned in our direction & has miscarried. Will you, if you meet Mr. G., say as much to him. I dare say it is quite safe & will come back in good time.

Yours affectionately,

R. W. E.

[Ralph Waldo Emerson]

To

WILLIAM HENRY FURNESS, Esq

VAILIMA, SAMOA, Sept. 9, 1894

MY DEAR CONAN DOYLE, — *If you found anything to entertain you in my Treasure Island article, it may amuse you to know that you owe it entirely to yourself. Your "First Book" was by some accident read aloud one night in my Baronial 'All. I was consumedly amused by it, so was the whole family, and we proceeded to hunt up back Idlers and read the whole series. . . . Enough — my heart is too full. — Adieu.*

Yours very truly

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

As a specimen of truly "chummy" letters, the concluding one of the delightful

series, "Marjorie Daw," by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, is given. As almost ideal correspondence of its kind, the whole series is highly to be commended.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

September 1, —

I am horror-stricken at what I have done! When I began this correspondence I had no other purpose than to relieve the tedium of your sick-chamber. Dillon told me to cheer you up. I tried to. I thought you entered into the spirit of the thing. I had no idea, until within a few days, that you were taking matters au sérieux.

What can I say? I am in sackcloth and ashes. I am a pariah, a dog of an outcast. I tried to make a little romance to interest you, something soothing and idyllic, and, by Jove! I have done it only too well! My father does n't know a word of this, so don't jar the old gentleman any more than you can help. I fly from the wrath to come — when you arrive! For O, dear Jack, there is n't any colonial mansion on the other side of the road, there is n't any piazza, there is n't any hammock, — there is n't any Marjorie Daw!!

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